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FRENCH PICTURES

IN

ENGLISH CHALK.

(*SECOND SERIES.*)

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE MEMBER FOR PARIS," &c.

LONDON :

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1878.

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JANUARY 27, 1933

TO
MONSIEUR LÉON CHARLES RENAULT,
MEMBER OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES,
A Token
OF THE AUTHOR'S SINCEREST REGARD.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
L'EMPIRE C'EST LA PAIX	I
FLEUR DE LYS	45
MADemoisELLE VIVIANE	99
THE SCEPTIC	153
THE COURTIER OF MISFORTUNE	187
PRINCE MOLESKINE'S CONSPIRACY	239
JACQUES GIRARD'S NEWSPAPER	279
JUSTIN VITALI'S CLIENT	317
A ROMANCE BY RUM LIGHT	363

12 L'EMPIRE C'EST LA PAIX.

L'EMPIRE C'EST LA PAIX.

REMINISCENCES OF A ZOUAVE.



I.

I REMEMBER being particularly pleased at reading in a newspaper the fine speech of our Prince President, in which he said: "*L'Empire c'est la paix.*" He was only Prince President then, but it didn't matter. "If Empire means peace," said I, "I'm for an Empire."

"And why?" asked Blanchette.

"Because if it's peace, they won't be wanting any soldiers, and I shan't have to serve my seven years."

"That's true," murmured Blanchette, blushing a little. "Then I'm for an Empire, too."

Blanchette and I were betrothed to one another: at least it was almost a settled thing between Blanchette's father, old Jean Poireau, and me, that if I wasn't taken by the conscription, he'd hear what I'd got to say about being married. I didn't much like him, old Jean Poireau. If I waited for Blanchette after vespers, or danced more than one quadrille with her at the village balls, he'd come up

and say, "Look here, young Aristide, just you sheer off; when you've drawn your lot and I know what's to become of you, then we'll see; but, for the present, keep your distance." Blanchette and I were often reduced to nodding to each other and sighing. I believe she thought it hard; I know I did.

Well, the conscription week arrived at last, and the drawing of the lots was to come off on the Friday. On the Sunday, going in to Mass (church is always very full on the Sunday before the conscription), I met Blanchette and said, "Blanchette, Blanchette, I feel all the courage running out of me as the day approaches; if I draw a bad number, the best thing I can do is to go and throw myself into the pond."

"No, no," answered Blanchette, rather pale; "you mustn't do that. Promise me you won't do it," she added, laying a hand on my sleeve. Her eyes were full of tears, and her little hand shook. I thought myself a brute for making her miserable. I pressed her hand somewhat tremulously and whispered—

"I'll tell you what, I'll go and call to-morrow on that Deputy of ours, M. de Champ-Guimauve, who makes us such fine promises at election time. I've never asked him for anything, and he can't refuse to drop a word to the Prefect about getting me exempted. He'll tell him I'm short-sighted, or that there's something the matter with my heart, which will be true enough, Blanchette."

Blanchette dried her eyes and tried to smile. When she smiled, it put hope in me for a whole day. We sat side by side at Mass that morning, and on the morrow early I started for the château of Champ-Guimauve, with

two of mother's best capons in my basket, and a bunch of winter flowers in my hand. You see it's always as well not to go empty-handed, even when calling upon a millionaire.

M. le Comte de Champ-Guillaume was the great man of our district. In 1851 we were living under a Republic, but we called him M. le Comte all the same ; which used to annoy him at election time, when he would insist upon being addressed as "Citizen," saying that we were all brothers, and that he was not a jot more than we were. Very affable he was, to be sure, at election time, M. de Champ-Guillaume ; and it was on the strength of this that I had determined to go and appeal to his kindness.

To tell the truth, however, what I purposed asking him was not exactly—well, no, not exactly fair, for the law said that those only should be exempted from service who could pay for a substitute, who were the only sons of widows, or who had bodily infirmities ; and I stood in none of these categories. But then, it was well known that the Count never scrupled to use his influence for his own tenants, and so why should he not do as much for me ? Besides, as Empire meant peace (and everybody was beginning to say we should soon have an Empire), what could the Government care about one soldier more or less ?

I found M. de Champ-Guillaume reading the *Moniteur Universel* on his lawn, with a cup of coffee before him, and a cigar between his lips. There was no election near, so that he didn't offer any objection when I addressed him as Monsieur le Comte. I don't even think he would have been much offended had I called him Monseigneur, as I noticed his two footmen did. He was graciously pleased to accept my two fowls, and promised that the flowers

should be remitted to Madame la Comtesse ; then, he set his eyeglass in his left eye and asked me what I wanted.

Upon this, I confess I felt rather as if I should like to turn back and go home, for M. le Comte de Guimauve with the eyeglass, and the Citizen Guimauve who had shaken hands with us all in front of the ballot-box, were individuals so entirely unlike, that it was difficult to realise they formed but one and the same person. I began to mumble something about the conscription, but made such a mess of it that he soon pulled me up, by exclaiming,—

“Ah ! just so, I perfectly understand ; you are going to become one of our brave national defenders, and have come to say good-bye. Well, my lad, I wish you joy, and ” (here an affable smile) “plenty of fighting.”

This wasn't it at all. I stammered and looked foolish.

“No, M. le Comte, it's just the other way. I agree with your speech about universal brotherhood, and no more conscription. You remember what you said about the conscription being like a monster that devoured its own children ? I'd rather not fight anybody ; I want to become ‘an honest tiller of the soil ’ and marry Blanchette.”

I observed that the visage of our Deputy lengthened as I recapitulated the items from his last electoral address ; the term “honest tiller of the soil ” was also his. He coughed, drew up his shirt-collar, and answered somewhat confusedly—

“H'm, just so ; I am, as you say, devoted to peace, and have always—yes, always—admired brotherhood. Nothing like brotherhood. But—ahem—if you had learned Latin, you would perceive the truth of the words *Si vis pacem, para bellum*—the meaning of which is, that unless France

has a large standing army, civilisation would be shaken in its basis, and there could be no security either for your father's field or for mine. It is from this motive, and this alone, that I voted the contingent of eighty thousand men this year. I beg your pardon ; I didn't catch your remark."

"I was saying that it was very hard, M. le Comte, to be taken for seven years against one's will."

M. le Comte joined the fingers of both his hands by the tips, and answered with unction—

"It is one of the most glorious traditions of democracy that every citizen shall pay his debt to the State, and the obligation falls upon all alike. Whilst you, my lad, will give seven years of your life, I on my side shall not be exempt. This very year I shall have to pay no less than two thousand five hundred francs to exonerate my son Hector ; another of my sons, the Vicomte de Champ-Guimauve, is actually serving his country at the present moment in a regiment of hussars."

"Yes, M. le Comte," I rejoined, with some bitterness ; "but the Vicomte de Guimauve is an officer, and can marry if he likes."

"But so will you in due time acquire a grade in the service if you be diligent and valiant. Listen, my lad," added our Deputy with a sudden display of benevolence : "you may rely upon me ; if you are taken by the conscription, I will exert my influence with the Ministry of War, and get you made—yes, get you made—a corporal."

"And Blanchette ?" I muttered, not much seduced by this brilliant prospect.

"Who is Blanchette ?" inquired our Deputy, who, I may

here remark, put wax to his moustaches, wore dye on his hair, and passed for an admirer of the adverse sex.

I explained who Blanchette was, M. le Comte listening with more attention than he had bestowed upon several of my other observations; and when I had done, he gave an encouraging smile—

“Rest easy, my good boy; I have heard of this Mademoiselle Blanchette, though I have never seen her. I will speak to her father if you go away, and we will take care that she is not married to any but a worthy man.”

After this consolation, all that remained for me to do was to disappear, which I did with speed. Don't ask me if I sang and whistled on the road going home, nor if I looked exuberantly cheerful during the next three days. There were ten or a dozen of my fellow-villagers in the same predicament as myself, and it wouldn't have done to put on a wry face before them. After all, a man is a man, you know, and must hold his head high. If I suffered anything, I hope I kept it to myself. By Friday morning I had got my pulse into subjection, and was prepared to face the fire—I mean the conscription-box—in the same kind of spirit in which a man had better always face unpleasantnesses.

Just as I was walking up to the Mairie to draw my lot, Blanchette, who had been looking out for me, wondering why I had kept aloof from her during three days, ran across the road and slipped a small parcel into my hand. It contained a medal of the Virgin and a note. Here is the note; I have not altered the spelling :—

“Aristide, they say that To ware this next the hart and To repeatte three times an AVE MARIA, and to say just Before

dipping one's hand Into the box, '*Sainte Vierge de Bon secours, écoutez celle qui m'aime,*' will make one draw a Good numbr. Please do it, Aristide, and you mustn't laugh in Doing it. You knowe it can't ever Do any harm. BLANCHETTE."

No, Blanchette, it did no harm, I am certain ; but probably Fortune was out of sorts with me that day, for when I dipped my hand into the box—and I did not laugh, I assure you—I drew out a number which I could not read at first from thinking of you. So I gave it to the Mayor, who read it for me.

"What number?" asked the Prefect ; and there was a second's pause whilst the paper was being unfolded.

"*Number thirteen,*" cried the Mayor.

"Good for the service," pronounced the General.

And ten days after, my poor Blanchette, I was a Zouave.

II.

There was no positive reason why I should hurry off so soon, for at that time the Government used considerably to give us five months' law : we drew in February and joined in July. But where would have been the use of waiting? No sooner was the drawing over than old Jean Poireau said to me, "Aristide, my lad, I'm sorry for you, but you see it's all up now, and I trust to your honour not to say anything more to Blanchette." The next day, seeing me come out of the Mayor's house, where I had been to get my passport, he looked at me as if he were relenting a little, and cried, "Listen, lad : I don't mind your seeing her just once more before you start—to say good-bye." But I answered, "No, Father Poireau, best

not ; you shall shake hands with her for me ; I am going this evening." And, sure enough, I took the train the same night.

You understand why I selected the Zouaves in preference to any other regiment.* The Zouaves were always garrisoned in Algeria then ; their mission was to make the Arabs pay taxes ; and as the Arabs would neither pay nor submit to our military tribunals—which for reasons of their own they considered detestable—there was usually some fighting every quarter-day. It wasn't the tax-paying I cared about ; I confess it was all one to me whether the Arabs settled their dues or not. But the Arabs fought like men, and in my then frame of mind I shouldn't have been over sorry if one of them had singled me out and cut my military career short. You see, that's the kind of impression being taken away from one's village makes upon one at first. By and by, when we have carried the musket a little, we grow wiser, or more callous, I don't know which.

I had not been a fortnight on African soil, and had scarcely got used to having the front part of my head shaved, as the fashion is in the Zouaves, when I was ordered off with my battalion to chastise Sidi-Ben-Mahmoud, of the tribe of Dusti. It wasn't quite clear to me what Sidi-Ben had done to deserve our visit ; but as far as I could gather, he and his fathers had lived contentedly in the same village for a couple of centuries, and he obsti-

* A soldier who joins immediately after conscription is at liberty to choose his own regiment. If he avails himself of the five months' law (as most do), he is drafted according to his height and his breadth of limb. The lithest only are put into the Zouaves.

nately refused to decamp in order that we might build a fortress on his property. That year, as it so happened, there had been a debate in the Chambers about the condition of Algeria. It was complained that we were doing nothing there, that we had been twenty years in possession without effecting the least good, that the English would have colonised the country in half the time. The members of the Opposition had insisted clamorously that we should civilise the Arabs, and the Prince President had sent pressing orders to the Governor-General to push on the work of civilisation without delay. Our Colonel, M. de Fracasse, reminded us of these facts as we set off, and remarked that it was absolutely binding upon us to civilise Sidi-Ben. So away we went to attack his village. Sidi-Ben and his people defended themselves like lions, and gave us as warm a piece of work as we could have wished for. The fighting lasted all day, from ten in the morning to six at night, and we lost two hundred men—eighty killed, a hundred and twenty wounded. But in the end we got the best of it, and we civilised Sidi-Ben; for, when the battle was over, there was not a single stone in the village left standing upon another: the camels, sheep, horses, men, women, and children were all hashed into mincemeat, and Sidi-Ben himself lay gloriously dead in the middle of the field with twenty wounds upon him.

I kept so resolutely to the front throughout this affair, that when we returned to barracks, Colonel de Fracasse called me up and said, "Aristide Brosse, you're the sort of soldier I like. You take as kindly to fighting as a babe to mother's milk. I make a corporal of you."

So there was I a corporal. Instead of five sous paid

regularly every five days, I received ten sous ; on my sleeve I wore a red worsted stripe ; and I was exempt from mounting guard. So far so good. But there was another aspect of my corporal's grade which I found less diverting. I had twenty men under my supervision, and if they were not irreproachably furbished as to their rifles, shoes, bayonets, knapsack-buckles, and uniform buttons, it was I who bore the blame. This leads me to remark what an edifying lot we were in our Zouave regiments. The Government would accept nobody for a Zouave who was not tough, nimble, and firm on his legs. But morals being no great object, the hot-tempered, rowdy, black-eyed countrymen of Provence were the most welcome ; they fought like the Arch-fiend when they were campaigning, and behaved much like the same personage when they were in garrison. It was with great pleasure I heard it said one day by a patriotic Prefect, that the army was an invaluable school for acquiring habits of steadiness and order ; for I acknowledge it would hardly have occurred to me to enunciate such an opinion myself. When my men were not on duty, they were drinking absinthe ; if they were not drinking absinthe, they were sustaining the national reputation for gallantry by laying siege to the wives and daughters of Arabs, who (I am talking of the male Arabs) broke their heads in return, or got their own broken, for the greater glory of civilisation. The proportion of deaths among us from *delirium tremens* was seven per cent. per annum,—a piece of statistics you will find in the official reports of the War Office for the year 1851, if you will take the trouble to consult that record.

I remained in Algeria nine months, during which period

I had the satisfaction of judging how unreservedly we were hated in that loyal colony, and how extremely probable it is that we shall continue to be hated there a hundred years hence, if we are not driven out of the country before that time. At the end of the nine months M. de Fracasse was summoned to Paris with his regiment. This was the first experiment in the way of having Zouaves to occupy garrisons in France, and there was considerable curiosity both amongst the public and amongst us ourselves to see what would come of it.

It was towards the middle of November, and the first observation I heard upon setting foot anew on French soil was, that "Empire was peace." Paris was in a steadily progressive state of simmer; Monsieur le-Prince Président was being depicted every day in the *Charivari* with a beaked nose, a circumstance which, I recollect, struck me as ominous; for experience has shown that whenever the French Press is suffered to reach the beaked-nose stage of liberty, something curious is preparing behind the curtain. We Zouaves had nothing to complain of as regards the way in which we were received. On the contrary, it was as if we had suddenly landed in the City of the Blessed. Rations of wine, packets of cigars, roast-meat to our ordinary, inspection and compliments by M. le-Prince Président in person, distribution of five-franc pieces, all came showering down upon us like refreshing manna. Our officers received presents of game and dozens of champagne from the Elysée Bonaparte; and I believe all the regiments in Paris were treated with the same disinterested liberality as we. Naturally, we liked it; and when told that it would continue so all the year

round, if only there could be an Empire instead of a finikin, flint-skinning Chamber, that was for ever doing its best to prevent the President from being open-handed, we were all agreed that the best thing Monsieur le President could do would be to send the Chamber to the right-about. This was especially my view, for the Government organs never ceased repeating that Empire meant peace, diminution of armaments, and encouragement of agriculture: things for which I cared more than for the cigars and the roast-meat. I had not forgotten Blanchette.

One morning M. de Fracasse rode into the barrack-yard, looking flushed and elated; it escaped none of us that he was wearing the ribbon of Commander of the Legion of Honour, instead of the rosette of officer which he had sported the day before. He was a handsome man, Colonel de Fracasse, and, when under the influence of a glass or two of Burgundy, had no lack of eloquence.

"Zouaves," cried he, "don't you think we have had enough of a Republic managed by an Assembly of canting 'citizens,' who humbug us with a lot of promises they never intend to keep?"

The image of the Citizen Champ-Guillaume started up before me, and I shouted energetically "Yes, yes!"

The Colonel eyed me with pleasure. "Corporal Brosse," said he, "you're a brave soldier." Upon which encouragement my brother-Zouaves lost no time in roaring "Yes, yes!" too.

"Bravo!" responded the Colonel, delighted. "That's it, my men; who is there among you that wouldn't like to have his pay doubled, or to be sent home to his village, at his option?"——

The cheers waxed deafening.

"Who is there that wouldn't like to have his glass full of wine, his pouch full of tobacco, and to marry the girl of his thoughts?"——

We grew black in the face.

"Then *vive le Princ*"——

But no, I snatched off my turban, and at the top of my voice, with all my heart and soul, shouted "*Vive l'Empereur !*"

The self-same hour I was made a sergeant, and a couple of days afterwards I was lying in the military hospital of the Val de Grâce, having been knocked over in the memorable affray that followed the *Coup d'État*.

III.

"You've done a pretty piece of work, Sergeant," groaned a man who was lying next me amongst the wounded at the Hôtel de Ville, before we were transferred to the hospital.

He made an effort to raise himself on one elbow; but the blood that was flowing from a bullet-wound in his chest left him no strength, and he sank back on the flags.

"Feel in my coat," he muttered, "and you'll find a pocket-book with my name and address, some letters, and some money. You're my enemy, but I can trust you to carry them to my wife." A throb of pain interrupted him, and caused him to pant; but he resumed,—"Tell her she must forgive me—you see, I promised her this morning that I wouldn't join in the fighting—she cried, and that's why I promised her—but when I saw you soldiers killing

the Republic, I didn't think I had any right to stand by—so I fought: tell her that, won't you? And—I've two little children at home; let her tell them from me that a man can die but once, and that so long as his life has been—has been”—— He made another painful effort to raise himself, but there was a new gush of blood, and his words froze on his lips. When I crawled to him to search for his pocket-book, he could only look at me as if in gratitude; but I believe he was already dead.

A few minutes afterwards a patrol came in, with some officers and police-detectives, to separate the wounded soldiers from the “rebels,” and to carry the former to the hospital, the latter to the prison infirmaries. As I was being lifted on a stretcher (one of my legs was broken), a detective stooped to examine my neighbour. “Oh, we know this one fast enough,” he cried, with a grin; “it's one of those cursed radical journalists: a good riddance of a bad rubbish.” And he gave the body a kick.

I writhed on my stretcher and felt myself glowing, seeing which, an officer said,—“Do you feel pain, my good fellow? Cheer up; you've spilt your blood in a noble cause, and you won't go unrewarded.”

Well, no, I didn't go unrewarded: I must do them that justice. Whilst I was lying at the Val de Grâce, not much cast down by my wound, but gloomy from some other cause that I couldn't quite explain, I had my promotion as colour-sergeant brought me, though you'll remember I'd not been plain sergeant above a few days. “Sergeant Brosse, I congratulate you,” said Colonel de Fracasse, who had come to the hospital to visit those of his regiment who were wounded. “Your conduct was admirable, my

man. When we gutted the house of that infernal Jacobin Deputy, it did one's heart good to see you work your bayonet. Fifteen dead in that house alone, and five women amongst them! I'm sorry for the women, but why the deuce didn't they keep out of the way? Tonnerre de Dieu! Brosse, but it was a fine day, and the Reds won't forget it in a hurry. *Vive l'Empereur!* and *vive l'Armée*, eh, my lad!"

Vive l'Armée! It seemed to me a little inappropriate that he should cry *Vive l'Armée* at a time when we had just established a new Government that was pledged to give us peace. *Vive la Paix!* according to my notions, would have been more the thing; and as soon as I was released from hospital I gave effect to these views by asking for a month's leave to go and visit my village. I have no need to tell you why I was so anxious about this month's leave; it wasn't the impatience to air my uniform with its two gold chevrons; but I own to having hoped more than once of late, that old Jean Poireau, who had declined to give his daughter to a conscript, with one sou a day, might allow her to wait a few months for a sergeant-major, whose pay was close upon two francs. The Adjutant-major, however, refused me leave point-blank. "Brosse, you're a valuable soldier," said he, "and we can't do without you. It's not more than four months now since the *Coup d'État*; and these Parisians, you know, we daren't trust them further than we can see 'em. At any moment we may be called upon to do another stroke of work."

"What! wasn't there enough blood-letting last December?" I murmured; and the vision of the gutted house,

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with its slaughtered women, rose up before me like a distant nightmare.

"That was nothing," replied the Adjutant quietly. "Please Heaven, one of these days we'll have much better fun than that, Brosse." And he turned on his heel, giving me a Havannah cigar to console me for not going to see Blanchette.

There was nothing for it but to wait. It was more than a year since I had looked at Blanchette, but I had heard news of her once or twice in letters from our village ; and soon after the Adjutant had refused me leave, I received a letter, in which, amongst other items, it was said : " You will be Glad to heer, Aristide, that your old sweetheart Blanchette is in good helth, and prittier than evr. But she's no longr a poor villige gurl for Mossieu le Conte de Cham-Guillaume, Who has bin very goode to the Poireau famly evr since you went, has founde her a place as dres-maker up at the towne of Mauveville, where she's very hapy and erns 4 Francs a day. Last time she cayme to the villige she had on a silk gownd."

I thought well of M. de Guillaume for keeping his word to me, and was glad to learn that Blanchette had got a silk gown. The letter had not come by post ; it was brought me by a fellow-villager of the name of Fourmiceau, who had just joined our regiment as a recruit, and who assured me that Blanchette had shed a great many tears after my departure—poor girl ! He also confirmed the assertion as to M. de Champ-Guillaume's kindness. The Count had come more than once to see old Jean Poireau ; he had improved his cottage for him, and had procured Blanchette a place, so that she might not spoil her pretty

hands churning butter and kneading bread. I felt softened towards M. de Guimauve, and regretted I had ever wronged him in thought. Perhaps Fourmiceau caught a trace of my emotion, for he exclaimed with a great gulp that sounded like a sob, "O Sergeant! there's nothing like our village. I, too, was to have been married, if it hadn't been for this conscription. You know Rose Mignon: she was the prettiest girl in the village."

"Patience, Fourmiceau, patience; you'll see her again."

"Yes, but we should have been so happy together." (Here the honest fellow rammed four thick knuckles into each of his eyes.) "We were betrothed ever since we were so high—not four feet from the ground—and she swore she would never forget me. But how can I hope that now?" (And at this Fourmiceau's tears, oozing out between his fingers, inundated his woeful countenance.) "Once our backs turned, Sergeant, what have we to hope? We can't ask them to wait seven years for us."

"But it won't be seven years," I answered, endeavouring to solace him; "the Empire's not proclaimed yet; but it seems that in a day or two the Senate are going to Saint Cloud to offer the crown to the Prince President."

"And what difference will that make?" he inquired with a sigh.

"Why, Empire is peace, and the Emperor, as soon as he is at the Tuileries, will send us all home; the Colonel said so."

"Oh, God bless the Emperor," cried Fourmiceau fervently; and I fancy he went off that very moment to write

a letter to Rose Mignon, begging her to wait for him just a little while longer.

I was quite correct in what I said about the Senate, for I had seen it in the *Moniteur*. Some days later, at morning parade, we were ordered for duty at mid-day to form a guard of honour on the road of the deputation. There were not only us Zouaves, but all the infantry of the Paris garrison—thirty thousand men—and we formed a complete double line the entire way from Paris to Saint Cloud. It was a fine sight: the whole population of the city was afoot, as it always is, to see anything that may happen to be going on, from a church ceremonial to a revolution, and the windows were gaudy with bunting, scarlet draperies, and long waving streamers lettered N. III. All the traces of the December affair had disappeared. At most, had you searched the crowd, you might have found some child or woman in mourning, hurrying along to get out of sound of the festivity, and refusing to stop and look on, and cheer with the rest. But I do not fancy there were many of these; the people in mourning stayed at home; and the carriages of the Senators could roll unimpeded between two close-packed lines of curious Parisians, who, it seems, were almost as excited and enthusiastic as they had been four years before, when the Republic was proclaimed. I must say, however, if enthusiastic as a body, they were not sparing of criticisms individually, and, as carriage after carriage swept by, bearing Senators or Deputies (for there was also a deputation of representatives going to see the sight), I heard some rather astonishing comments from the spectators behind me:—"Hi, Jules, do you see old De Tournecasaque? he's wearing just the same face as he did

when he went to swear allegiance to Charles X. and Louis Philippe—the old hunks.” “Here’s another again, look at him; it’s De la Broche-Crauelin, who betrayed Henri V.; and beside him, Floupin, the late solicitor to the Orleans family. Ugh! go and wash, both of you!” “Here’s another pretty pair, Turpigny and De Borné, a couple of badgers to match; they’d both have been in Clichy by this time, if it hadn’t been for the *Coup d’État*”—and so on flowed the compliments without a moment’s cease. I listened, rather amused at first, for, after all, it was no concern of mine what they said; but, at last, amongst the carriages of the Deputies came that of M. de Champ-Guillaume, who had recently been re-elected in our Department as an official candidate, and his arrival was saluted by this broadside:—“Oh, here’s De Champ-Guillaume, the old sinner; when he’s not dangling after some ballet-girl, he’s sure to be dancing a jig before the reigning Government. I saw him with a red bonnet on in ’48, crying *Vive la République!* kick him from ever so high, he’s sure to fall on his legs.” At these words my patience abandoned me. It was Blanchette’s benefactor they were insulting in this way; so I turned round in wrath and shouted—“What do you mean by speaking like this of your betters?” I suppose I looked rather ferocious with my half-shaved head and my new moustache, for they suddenly held their peace, and the rest of the procession passed by uncriticised. I have remarked, by the by, that it is not very difficult to make Parisians hold their tongues, if you speak loud with a rifle in your hand.

Well, the deputation went and came, and there were mighty rejoicings and illuminations that night to celebrate

the auspicious change from Republicanism to Empire. The soldiers had wine given them in the barracks, and we non-commissioned officers were regaled with Bordeaux and a glass of Cognac apiece. However, the Empire was not yet proclaimed officially; that was only to happen in December, eight months afterwards, and so I still had to take patience before I could hope for long leave, or expect to be disbanded. After all, I reflected, we must be reasonable; the Emperor has only just reached the throne; he can't reduce his army before making certain that he is safe. Let us wait our eight months.

And I did, and I was recompensed for my steadfastness: for at length the day of glory arrived, the Empire was solemnly proclaimed at the Hôtel de Ville; there was a *Te Deum* at Notre Dame, and the whole army blossomed out into the new buttons, with the Imperial eagle and crown upon them. I am not a drunkard, but I drained three bottles that day and toasted the Emperor until the tables seemed to be dancing an infernal waltz around me. As a result, I was not particularly steady when I tottered to bed, but I had presence of mind enough to ejaculate as I turned in between sheets—

“At last! Providence be extolled! We shall have peace now.”

. IV.

Would you believe that when, some six weeks after this, I applied again for leave, the Adjutant took me kindly by the arm and drew me into a corner, where, in a mysterious voice, and without further preparation, he said: “Look

here, Sergeant Brosse: I don't mind telling you—for you're made of good stuff and won't blab—we're soon going to have a war."

Had the Adjutant suddenly fired a pistol at my turban without cause or warning, I could not have looked more disgusted.

"War!" I echoed.

"Yes, war," he rejoined. "I knew you would be pleased; but, hush! not a word to anybody: the thing's a secret, and none of us are supposed to know it."

"And who are we going to fight?"

"Hush! I needn't tell you that. You're a Frenchman, Brosse, and in your patriotic heart must feel the wound of Waterloo rankle at every hour of the day. Stuff, man, it's no use denying; I've seen you at work and know you're one of the right sort. Well, you'll soon have a war to your heart's content: none of your trashy battles against Arabs or Reds, but a good slap-up tussle, with plenty of cracks on the head and promotion to follow."

"Then we are going to fight the English," I observed, with calm desperation.

"That's it, to fight the English. You understand,—the Emperor must show these caper-cutting Parisians that there's some of the old blood in him. If he doesn't fall foul of somebody, they'll think he's cast in the same mould as that poor old Louis Philippe, who gave us almost eighteen years of peace; and that would never do; the people would soon be snapping their fingers in his face. No, Brosse, he must wipe off the old score of Waterloo, and you and I'll help him to do it. You can have three days' leave if you like; but we can't give you more, for the

recruits 'll be coming up soon, and you'll have to drill 'em with all your might and main."

"And this is the Empire of peace," I remarked, with a ghastly grin.

"Yes," replied the Adjutant, grinning too; "we shall have peace—after the war."

What should you have done under such circumstances; sat down and howled? This would not have been a great assistance to me. I went straight off to a circulating library, asked for an annual register, drew out a pencil and paper, and set to work computing, by the aid of figures and probabilities, how long this heaven-forsaken campaign was likely to last. England, I was delighted to observe, was as ill-prepared for a war as possible. Nominal strength of army, 85,000; probable effective strength, 40,000. The navy, to be sure, looked biggish; but that branch didn't concern me. Against the 40,000 men we could launch 400,000 without trouble—*i.e.*, ten men to one. Presumable result; have the English out in Flanders and eat up the last man in three weeks. Total duration of campaign, including preparations, about two months.

"Well, it's not so bad as I thought," I murmured, a little relieved. "If operations commence shortly, it will only put off my seeing Blanchette for three or four months. Meantime, it's no use going to the village for a couple of days only; I'll wait." Accordingly, I applied myself with zeal to the drilling of recruits.

Had I been less absorbed than I was with ideas of universal harmony, I might have noticed long before, that ever since H.I.M. the Friend of Peace had held the reins of power, the offensive forces of the country had been

slowly increasing. As President he had added to the war contingent every year ; as Emperor, he had inaugurated his reign by bravely calling for twenty thousand more men than usual. There were signs, too, not discernible to the civilian eye, but which, as a soldier, ought to have struck me. All the magazines and store-houses were being replenished ; our rifles were being examined, tested, and often exchanged for better ones ; new accoutrements were not stinted ; the cavalry were being remounted and reorganised ; leave was difficult to obtain. These tokens are so many hieroglyphics which signify hostilities. However, the war did not come so quickly as the Adjutant had seemed to think. One month passed, then a second, then two or three more, and yet there appeared no symptoms of a quarrel with Great Britain. On the contrary, the talk was only about our brave allies, and the sympathique M. de Palmerston and M. le Comte d'Aberdeen, who loved us well, and about the new journey from Paris to London in twelve hours, price 110 francs first class.

When I called the Adjutant's attention to these unpromising symptoms, he replied that it was all "blague." "We're doing it to throw dust into their eyes," said he. "Perfidious Albion will guess nothing until we are down upon her." But even the Adjutant was soon bound to own that his perspicacity had been at fault. France and England, for a while hand in hand, were soon locked arm in arm. The time-honoured pictures of ridiculous Highlanders vanished from the print-shop windows ; the comic actors, who were great at playing Englishmen, were significantly recommended to throw less local colour than usual into their exercises ; journalism received a hint not to poke fun at

the British. A new foe was looming on the horizon in the shape of the Czar of all the Muscovies, whom Gaul would not have cared to tackle without Albion.

Shall we fight or shall we not? The question oscillated on the trays of the balance for a doubtful time, until at last the ayes had it—war was declared.

Then it was as though France had been abruptly roused from a forty years' lethargy. A ferocious thrill shot throughout the land. In every village where there lingered a living wreck of that mighty army that marched to defeat and death in the Russian snows in 1812; in every hamlet where the middle-aged men remembered the Cossack invasion of 1814, there was a crusade preached by old soldiers, Imperial officials, and priests. Young men sang the *Marseillaise*, and flew to be enrolled; old men looked up and talked of being revenged; young girls would smile upon none but soldiers, and accounted them poltroons who stayed behind; mothers sat down, and, with a sigh of patience, made lint—for mothers will never have a heart for war, say Ambition and Glory what they will. And there was all this excitement, all this fury, all this indescribable delirium, all these defiant shouts of men in public, all these tears of women in secret, for the sake of killing a few Russians. It is curious that men should hate each other so cordially from living on opposite sides of a boundary line.

In Paris everything was topsy-turvy. It does honour to humanity that an individual who had been harmlessly founding a journal for the propagation of peace doctrines, became of a sudden an object of contumely, and had to run one afternoon on the Boulevard des

Capucines for his life ; whilst, on the other hand, subscriptions for the war poured in at such a ceaseless rate that ten million francs were reached in no time. Nobody remembered the *Coup d'État* or bore rancour from it ; that was a thing of the past, now ; ought we not all to remain united in face of the enemy ? Calling to remembrance the condoning stuff of which we Frenchmen are moulded, I am often tempted to wonder that our rulers do not treat us to a *Coup d'État* more frequently, since they can obtain indemnity so easily by leading us off to a war. It was just exactly as if the people of France had made this bargain with our Emperor : " You killed five thousand of us to seat yourself on the throne ; try and get a hundred thousand more of us put to death in the Crimea, and we give you a receipt in full."

As for myself, I was of course seized by the war contagion like the others. You don't remain long in a lazaret without catching some of the fever from the rest. Was it that I had ceased to sigh for peace and to think of Blanchette ? Oh no, but I was beginning to perceive the truth of what our Adjutant had said. " We can't expect the Emperor to let himself pass for a craven soul," I reasoned : " first let him prove that he is not afraid of war, and then we shall have peace ever after ; for the other nations will be wary of molesting him." It was a variation on M. de Guimauve's text, *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. It is true I was a little out at sea as to our reasons for assailing the Russians ; but this was a point of no importance. It's a soldier's duty to obey orders, not to ask questions.

I am sorry to say, though, that I failed in the endeavour to instil these views into Fourmiceau, who revealed a soul

altogether unpatriotic at the news that he was about to start for the Euxine. In vain did I point out to him that we were going to avenge the treatment that his grandfather had suffered, and consolidate the throne of the Sultan of Turkey. He made use of disrespectful expressions towards his grandfather, and wished the Sultan of Turkey in a city some latitudes south of Constantinople. There was no bringing him to his senses. He snivelled and whimpered in the most dismal way. "You promised me peace, Sergeant, and I wrote to Rose to wait for me. I shall never be able to do that again."

"Courage, Fourmiceau," I exclaimed ; "think of the promotion and the Crosses of Honour, man."

"Yes, there are plenty of Crosses of Honour," groaned Fourmiceau ; "but there's only one Rose Mignon. Rose is more to me than a million crosses."

What was I to say? My own heart was not of the lightest. I had thought of running down just for a day and taking a parting look of Blanchette, but on second consideration I deemed it was better to keep away. Would it have been kind to renew our friendship, when the first news she might hear of me after our parting was that some Russian had sent me to sleep for good and all in the Crimean snow? And yet it seemed to me that I should at least like to thank M. de Guimaube for what he had done for Blanchette ; I might not have another occasion ; and you know, one goes less cheerfully to face death when there are debts of gratitude unpaid. However, an opportunity was given me.

I have said there were vast subscriptions organised for the war. They were of all sorts : some for the expenses of

the war itself, some for the relief of the wounded, others for the distribution of creature-comforts to the troops. It so happened that on one of the committees of this last form of subscription our Deputy officiated : and on the morning of our departure from Paris he came with a bevy of gentlemen in kid gloves and ladies with tricolour rosettes to hand glasses of cognac (in France nothing is done without cognac : no cognac, no enthusiasm), Bologna sausages, packets of cigars, and mugs of Burgundy out of a fine spring-cart covered with flags. In the midst of the excitement occasioned by his appearance, I pushed my way up to him, and with emotion said, "Monsieur le Comte, I wish to thank you for your generous protection of a girl whose name I had mentioned to you ; it is noble of you to befriend the child of a poor man as you have done."

He did not recognise me at first, for my Zouave dress altered me ; but when he had scanned my features, and heard me pronounce the name of Blanchette, it struck me that he turned red.

"Monsieur le Comte, I, too, am but a poor man," I added ; "but in some days I may be a dead man, and a dying man's blessing never did any harm. I hope you will allow me to shake hands with you."

At this I observed his redness change abruptly, and he became pale. I set it down to natural result of feeling. He gave me his hand, which was cold and shook somewhat, but his eyes did not face mine.

"You're a brave fellow," he stammered. "I—I—hope nothing will happen to you out there." He was evidently in a hurry to change the subject, for he turned round

towards an officer in hussar uniform, who had come with him, and said: "This is my son—ahem—who is going out there, too. Raoul, here is one of our fellow-villagers. I trust if you have an opportunity of doing him a good turn you will not fail."

M. le Vicomte returned my salute, and cordially shook hands with me, when I ejaculated: "I pray, mon Lieutenant, I may have an opportunity of proving that gratitude is not a vain word. If you are ever in danger, may I be next you to ward it off."

Not knowing what had passed between his father and me, I fancy he imagined the Count had been giving me a hundred-franc note; but as we Frenchmen are in the habit of offering to die for one another on slight incitation, my mode of tendering thanks would not appear to him particularly exaggerated.

To close the interview, the Count handed me a brimming glass of wine, and I drained it to the health of Blanchette.

I make no doubt you will dispense me from giving you an account of the Crimean campaign. It has been described often enough already, and I question if my additional experiences would be likely to interest you. Let me only remark that all the glories of war, such as I had beheld them on a small scale at the sacking of Sidi-Ben's village, and again in the gutting of houses and sweeping of streets in Paris, in December '51, I had full opportunities of admiring again at Alma, Inkermann, and the siege of Sebastopol. A battle is a fine thing. It is nothing more nor less than standing in close rows with not elbow-room enough, and firing at targets you are unable to

see, whilst you are being mowed down in your turn by balls and bullets you are unable to avoid. But there are degrees in battles. A small battle is one where the fun lasts but half a day, and you lose only ten or fifteen thousand men—the population of a flourishing borough town; a good battle worth speaking about is one that keeps you on your legs (or off them) for twelve or sixteen hours, and in which the two sides between them part with some fifty thousand men—the population of a thriving manufacturing city. I say nothing of those petty skirmishes which take place at the outposts, and in which you lose no more than a couple of hundred men—just enough to found an Australian colony with. A true soldier learns to disregard these; he is even a little ashamed of himself when he gets knocked down in engagements so insignificant.

One of the beauties of war is that it prepares men for a good many of the civic virtues, by making them splendidly indifferent to the sight of slaughter. I suspect this has not a little to do with the little account we Frenchmen take of such episodes as those which inaugurated his Majesty's most happy reign. How, indeed, get up much sympathy for a few radicals swept into the gutter, when you have strode with unblenching eye, and your meerschaum pipe between your lips, over a field strewn as thickly with dead as a wood with fallen twigs after a hurricane? Thus public order is the gainer, and rulers who, in other countries less fortunate than ours, might hesitate to employ ball-cartridge to keep themselves in office, need never have such pusillanimous fears in France. If dead fall in our streets, we have a Morgue to receive them.

✱ I missed none of the Crimean campaign, reaching the seat of war amongst the first, and leaving it amongst the last. I thought, at starting, the whole affair would take six months; and during the long siege of Sebastopol, being confident every day that we should take the town on the morrow, I wrote home but seldom, preferring, when the time came, to carry all my news in person. So I did not hear much of Blanchette; in fact, I did not hear about her at all; for the letters that came to me from the old people at home, were all about me, as mothers' and fathers' letters are, and there was nothing said of Blanchette. Perhaps you will wonder why I did not ask them to break this silence, but we soldiers are superstitious, and like better to trust to the saw that no news is good news. On bivouac-nights, though, when those perishing Russian winds whistled keen and drove sleep away, more than once did I think of the patient little hands that were stitching in France, perhaps at the very moment I was musing on them. Blanchette, Blanchette! you lit up many a dark sky for me on bitter winter nights; and on that day when we lit the bonfires in the camp at the news that peace was declared, why did I colour like a schoolboy at the thought that there was nothing more now could stand between us two, since I was no longer a poor peasant, but a Captain, and a Knight of the Legion of Honour?

For I must tell you I rose to a captaincy over the bodies of my fallen comrades. Promotion marches quickly in war time, especially in the Zouaves. We were generally in the thick of the fighting, whatever it was, and our officers fell by the half-dozen. The epaulet of sub-lieutenant came at Alma; that of lieutenant at Inkermann; the captaincy

arrived, by and by, in a kind of forlorn-hope affair, in which I ought to have been blown into bits ; but somehow escaped. As for the cross, it was pinned to my coat after a small skirmish, one of twenty others in which men by the score, who did more than I, were passed unnoticed. This is the fate of war. I had the luck to see lying on the ground an officer of hussars, who had just been dismounted, and, as the Vicomte de Champ-Guillaume was pretty often in my thoughts, I rushed forward to pick this officer up. Sure enough, it proved to be the Viscount. I hoisted him on my shoulders, and returned with him to our lines, walking backwards, so as to protect him, to the best of my ability, from our friends the Russians in front. When, at last, I deposited him safely on the ground, I found five hundred of our men had stopped firing to clap their hands, and half-a-dozen hussar officers carried me off to the General of the Division (M. de Fracasse, our old Colonel), who threw his arms round my neck and gave me his own cross. It seemed to me that this was a great deal of fuss for nothing, for I was not aware at the time that I had received a wound, and I felt more than recompensed already, from having saved M. de Champ-Guillaume's life.

One evening, in May '56, I was rolling along a very dusty road in a very shaky fly, on the box of which Fourmiceau, who had left an arm in the Crimea, and who had become my servant, was gesticulating with the one hand that remained to him. Never very expert at controlling his sentiments, Fourmiceau was on this occasion giving full career to his sensibility, and bedewing his honest cheeks with an emotion rather contagious. For the fact is, we were on our way to our village, which I had not

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seen since five years, and Fourmiceau since four; and Fourmiceau began to gesticulate at the precise moment when we came in sight of the first well-remembered cottage, around and opposite which the whole village were gathered to receive us. It seems we were heroes, for my old father and mother sobbed as if their hearts would break when I got out of the fly, and neither of them found strength to do anything but cling to me. Poor father! His two brave old hands shook like in ague when they felt my cross and epaulets; they had never so played with baubles for sixty years. But mother was not looking at the epaulets: "Why are you carrying a crutch, my boy; you never wrote to us that you were wounded?"—"Bah, mother, it's nothing, it doesn't prevent me from walking."—"But—but, child, you can scarcely stand—you're crippled—they've been maiming you, those Russians have."—You see, I'm selfish—I'm speaking only about myself: but there was just the same scene with Fourmiceau.

Great glories of war, you leave fine hand-marks upon our villages! After father and mother our old fellow-villagers came clustering up around us,—that is, such of them as were living; for where was sturdy Jacques, who guided his plough so straight, and Antoine, who sang so roundly at the village wakes, and Louis, who was our village champion at bowls? There is the mother of Jacques, with her face pinched awry from weeping; there the father of Antoine, pressing up to ask us whether his boy has a grave to himself in the cemetery at Balaclava; and in yonder cottage lately lived the parents of Louis, but the cottage is empty now. When the old people received

the black-bordered envelope it broke their hearts, and they're both dead!

But why linger on such episodes? a day of return should be a day of joy. Some must die that others may conquer; and if Jacques, Antoine, and Louis have lost their lives, surely it is for their country's—at least, for the Emperor's—sake, and no patriotic parent could wish them a better fate. I turn from the faces nearest me, most of which I own are careworn, for it appears the taxes have been heavy this year; and as there were not hands enough to plough the fields, there is likely to be no harvest next August,—I turn from these faces and look around me for old Jean Poireau; then, in a low voice, I ask for Blanchette. A feeling creeps over me that she must be somewhere in the crowd—hiding to see whether I would inquire for her, and prepared to come forward with her sweet eyes smiling, tearful, yet ready to gaze into mine with the same candid look of bygone days. I look around, and there is no Blanchette. But, perhaps, she is still away at Mauveville, in the place M. le Comte procured her, and her old father has gone to live with her?

“Isn't that it, mother; Blanchette is still at Mauveville?”

“Oh, my boy!” answers mother. “Is it of Blanchette you're speaking? Why, Blanchette has become a great lady.”

“A great lady, mother?”

“Yes; M. le Comte found her a place at Mauveville, but she's been gone from there these two years. Somebody else got her a place in Paris, and now she's very rich, and has her carriage, and wears golden bracelets.”

"Then she's married?"

"I don't know, child; perhaps she may be. But I hear she's a great actress at one of the Paris theatres, and earns showers of money."

Just then Fourmiceau pulls my sleeve, looking very wobegone and pale. "I knew it would be so, Captain. Rose Mignon's gone. She's left the village for Paris, and nobody has any news of her."

"And these are not the only two," remarks our poor old Curé, with a sigh; "for the Conscription takes the village girls as well as the village lads."

V.

Blanchette an actress—Blanchette ride in her carriage! And yet why not? We soldiers are no Puritans that we should think a woman lost because she performs on the boards of a theatre. We respect Art, and is not the stage one of the highest branches of art? Is it not a noble profession, and one which many of the purest and best of women have exercised? Why shouldn't my Blanchette be an actress?

I thought for a while I was going to be a cripple for life—my wound being a shell one, tiresome and long to heal. But I ended by pulling through, and when, after six months' nursing, I was strong enough to resume service, I set off for Paris with the intention of going to all the theatres one after another, and looking for Blanchette. I ought to mention, by the by, that I had ceased to be particularly enthusiastic in the cause of disarmament. At the end of the Russian campaign I had been drafted into

the Zouaves of the Guard with a pay of 6000 francs, and some of my views on military matters were much modified. I was beginning to understand that a great nation should not be niggardly with regard to its troops; and though far from decrying the advantages of peace, yet I deemed it incumbent upon every one to admit that war had its compensations. This is one of the most satisfactory results of having an immense standing army raised by forced conscription. The opinions of one half the men are at total variance with those of the other half, which prevents monotony. Those who have been dragged away from their fields, and remain privates on two sous a day, detest the service, groan for reductions, and are in favour of constant peace. On the contrary, those who in war have won epaulets—which they would never have acquired by planting turnips and ploughing corn-land—have the strongest objection to any change.

So I came to Paris. I had ascertained from our Mayor that Blanchette was not married. It is impossible to get married in France without the fact being known in one's village by the publication of banns, and there had been no banns published for Blanchette. I concluded she had been befriended by some great artist who had seen signs of talent in her; perhaps by some manager, who, in passing through Mauveville, had been struck by her beauty. I had read of such things in books. It is true that, at the time I knew her, Blanchette could do little more than just read and write, but there was nothing to prevent her having perfected her education after my departure. She might have had opportunities of study at Mauveville. Anyhow she had succeeded in obtaining an

engagement, and I was persuaded that all actresses were required to be well educated.

I had looked in vain for the name of Blanchette Poireau in all the newspapers and playbills, but that did not alarm me. Without quite understanding the practice, I was aware that French actresses seldom played under their real names, and there was nobody in our village who could enlighten me as to Blanchette's pseudonym. I began my tour of inspection by the Théâtre Français, where I went five nights running to see different pieces ; after that I tried the Odéon, then the Gymnase, then the Vaudeville—resort of high-class comedy. After that I explored the Gaieté, Ambigu-Comique, and Porte Saint Martin—homes of melodrama and tragedy ; and one night I went to the Palais Royal, feeling very nervous the whole evening, for I should not have liked to find Blanchette there. It occurred to me that perhaps the villagers had made a mistake, and that Blanchette was a singer, not an actress. Her voice had always seemed sweet enough to me for any opera-house in the world. I put on a dress-coat and white gloves, and went night after night to the Grand Opera, the Opera Comique, and the Lyrique. My brother officers at mess said, "Brosse has gone music mad," and our Colonel, hearing that I spent my evenings at the play, remarked that the whole of my pay would soon be swallowed up. He wrote to a brother of his who was connected with the Ministry of Fine Arts, and I received a packet of play-orders enough to carry me over a twelve-month. The Government is extremely civil towards us officers of the Guard.

We were in March '57, and the Paris winter season was

almost over. I had seen all the "successes" of the year until I was sick of them. The *Fiammina* of M. Mario Uchard, at the Français, haunted me like a nightmare. *Mathias l'Invalide*, of the Variétés, stalked after me like a ghost. *Les Marrons Glacés*, of the Palais Royal, had given me an indigestion; and the tunes of the *Reine Topaze*, at the Lyrique, buzzed in my head and made solitude hideous. A good many of the principal actresses were leaving Paris to go starring in the provinces. All inquiries on my part had failed to elicit any information as to Blanchette's whereabouts, and I felt almost disposed to give up my chase until the next year, when, one day, our Colonel gave out that an Exalted Personage was going to the Théâtre des Fantaisies Gauloises that evening, and that I was to be on duty.

When certain Exalted Personages in our country go to the play, it is usual, in view of possible eventualities, to accommodate a score or so of soldiers with places in the gallery, a dozen detectives with seats in the pit, and five or six military officers with stalls. The officers are in plain clothes, but no objection is made if they have a fancy to take a revolver in their pockets. Accordingly, towards seven I made my appearance at the theatre, with an offensive weapon in the tails of my coat, but a demeanour and costume otherwise peaceable. With me went Fourmiceau. He was still my servant, and had a few days before expressed a desire to go to the theatre. I thought this a good opportunity of gratifying him, so he went into the pit.

The Théâtre des Fantaisies Gauloises is one of those devoted to a style of piece that came into fashion at about

the same time as the establishment of the Second Empire. The burlesques and extravaganzas performed there would, in nine cases out of ten, provoke adverse manifestations on the part of the audience in countries entitled respectable. But we Frenchmen are exempt from prejudice ; we don't go in for respectability—which, of late years, we have held to be an insufferably slow virtue, unworthy of an intelligent people.

On the evening of my visit the playbill announced *La Femme de mon Voisin*—a choice *lever de rideau*, in one act ; and *Le Roi Candaule*, a musical burlesque in three acts.

This last was the *pièce de résistance*. It was a delightful composition, much in favour at that time with the golden youth of our capital, and the manager was making roaring receipts with it ; thanks, no doubt, to two or three ladies who, attired in no more raiment than was necessary, played with abundant spirit in the principal parts. For myself, having no great taste for pieces of the *Roi Candaule* type, I had never been to the *Fantaisies Gauloises* before ; and finding that the Exalted Personage was not likely to arrive in his stage-box till eight, I sat down in the crush-room with a brother-officer to take coffee and chat.

A general election was soon about to take place, and the papers contained hardly any but electoral news. We discussed the chances of the Opposition, who, it seemed, were gathering all their strength for the contest. My brother Zouave was of opinion that an ideal Parliament was one such as we possessed at that moment. Not a single member of the Opposition ; no publication of debates allowed ; all the laws voted in strict privacy by two hundred Deputies, elected rather by the exertions of ninety

Prefects than by that of ten million electors.—“With such a Parliament,” said he, “and a Senate to match, everything goes on swimmingly for us. No talk of reductions, no diminution of pay, and we get all the best places under Government.” He lit a cigarette, and added: “If any of these Opposition howlers get in, there’ll be a change of tune, you’ll see. The halcyon days of the military will be over. Egad! I don’t like those Liberals. A lot of canting prigs. What do they mean by saying that the Second Empire is a reign of immorality? I don’t find the Second Empire immoral; do you, Brosse?”

At that moment a waiter came and said: “I believe *he* has arrived, sir.” He was the Exalted Personage. I paid for the coffee, and my comrade and I hurried in to our places.

The E. P. had just taken his seat, and had got his double-barrelled glass already turned towards the stage. In the stalls there was something like a flutter of excitement amongst the spectators, who belonged to the Jockey Club or the Club of the Rue Royale, and who were on the look-out for the “star” of the piece—a Mademoiselle Pomponnine, a débutante of not more than twelve months’ standing, and whose peculiar talent, as I understood, lay in lifting her foot to a surprising height in performing our national dance. Mademoiselle Pomponnine was expected to appear in a moment or two; and, indeed, I had not been in my stall two minutes when an enthusiastic clapping of white-gloved hands by my immediate neighbours announced that she was coming.

Yes, there she came, and without more ado caught up

the tune the fiddlers were playing, and launched into melody. But why did I—I, Aristide Brosse, bound as if shot at the same instant—why did I grip hold of the two arms of my stall, and stare before me like a fool? Why did two great drops of perspiration stream down my stupid face? Why did my comrade look at me and say: “Hallo, Brosse, are you ill? you’re white as a sheet, man!” Why, in that flaunting, dazzling, spangled girl on the stage, who had not ten ounces of clothing upon her, whose arms and shoulders were covered with violet-powder, whose face was rouged, whose lips were smiling brazenly at the public, and whose sweet—unutterably sweet—voice was trolling a song that made me, an old soldier, blush up to the roots of my hair?—I recognised ——; but I needn’t tell you whom. I have never pronounced the name since.

I left the E. P. to take care of himself, started up and rushed out. I meant to go straight home, but in the lobby I was stopped by Fourmiceau, who had left the pit and was striding up and down, flourishing his one arm menacingly, and muttering interjections that appeared to dumfound the waiters. On seeing me he rushed forward and stammered —“Ah, you saw her, didn’t you, Captain?”

“Yes, Fourmiceau; but don’t let’s talk about it. Never speak on the subject to me again.”

But he paid no attention to my words; he continued to wave his arm.

“Why, who are you talking about, Fourmiceau?”

He seized me by the cuff and dragged me to a box-door, through the bull’s-eye of which we could see another private box opposite. It was occupied by two cavaliers with

waxed moustaches, and by a lady who was dressed like a rainbow, and was staring about her with a self-possession altogether remarkable.

"That's Rose Mignon," hissed he. "Will you tell me now to cry *Vive la Conscription* and *Vive la Guerre*? What have the conscription and the war done for me? This" (and he touched his stump of an arm) "and that,"—and he pointed fiercely to Rose Mignon.

"Hush, Fourmiceau," I said. "Not so loud. There's a detective from the Rue de Jérusalem listening."

FLEUR DE LYS.

FLEUR DE LYS:

A STORY OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR.



I.

ONE morning in October 1870 the town of O——, one of the oldest and most illustrious in France, underwent the humiliation of seeing a foreign army march in triumph through its streets. The event had been foreseen as inevitable more than a month beforehand ; but the town was so proud and patriotic, its 'scutcheon was so bright, the roll of its achievements so teemed with great deeds, that honest burghers, who ignored strategy, had been pleased to doubt to the end, half-thinking that some miracle would interpose to save them from such crushing degradation. But O—— was not defensible, as all military men well knew. The fortifications, behind which, four centuries ago, it had stood one of the most memorable sieges in history, had long been demolished ; and as no others had been built in their place, nothing could have come of resistance but bombardment and total ruin. To spare the population these needless sufferings, the French garrison had retreated—not,

indeed, without fighting, for appearance' sake and against double odds, a battle which was hopeless from the first.

And so the Prussians were tramping, with bayonets fixed and helmets glistening, through the narrow streets of the venerable city. The morning was grey and a little misty ; a cold, drizzling rain had been falling during the night ; and this, taken in connection with the sombre uniforms and travel-stained appearance of the invading troops, the silent throngs of spectators that bordered either side of the roadway, and the mournful notes of the cathedral bell (which happened to be tolling that morning for a funeral service), gave the solemnity much more the character of a burial procession than of a triumphal entry of conquerors. And yet there they were, conquerors notwithstanding, and with all the pride of conquest stamped on their brows. There was no mistaking the dogged but exulting looks, the heavy, resolute tread, and that peculiar grasp of the rifle-stock which speaks of being on the watch and ready to fight again at a moment's notice ; nor *did* the spectators mistake it. Singularly enough, however, the predominant feeling amongst them was evidently rather one of curiosity than of anger. The day before, the Mayor had, in great trouble of mind, covered the walls of the town with placards, beseeching the inhabitants to be calm, and not to insult their victors ; but his fears on this ground proved unfounded. The crowds stared, but did not seem particularly shocked by what they saw. Perhaps during the first five minutes, whilst the vanguard of Uhlans were filing past, and a band that came behind them played the martial strains of the *Wacht am Rhein*, a murmur or two might have been heard, and a few French countenances might

have been seen to turn pale ; but soon this wore off. As regiment after regiment went by, and the crowd grew familiar with the faces of their foes, sensitiveness became blunted. By the end of an hour's time it had almost vanished ; and, curiosity being then cloyed, the crowd lapsed into that state when it needs but a ludicrous incident to break the ice and revive that natural propensity to be jocular which lurks within all great concourses of men ; and it so chanced that the needed incident occurred.

At a spot where four roads met was a plug-hole, which, having been somehow widened, formed an insidious and dangerous foot-trap. Most of the soldiers, with Teutonic prudence, avoided it ; but one less wary set his foot in it without looking, and before he could extricate himself was bumped by the man behind him, and this second man by a third ; so that they all three tripped up and fell with a crash, letting go their rifles, and plunging their entire company into confusion ; upon which a delighted titter broke out along the whole line of spectators. Somebody made a joke (rather feeble) about conquerors biting the dust, and the rest laughed at it. This encouraged a second wag, and then another ; and from that moment all these Frenchmen stood consoled for the capture of their town, for the requisitions, and for everything else that might happen to them that day, by the thought that three of their vanquishers had made themselves ridiculous. Happy the nation whom such episodes can cheer ! The remainder of the marching past went off gaily enough. The onlookers criticised with much satisfaction, though in whispers, the cut of their enemies' coats.

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the poker-like rectitude of their backbones, the absence of pipe-clay on their belts, and, of course, their military tactics, which were generally voted absurd.

There was at least one person, however, among the throng whose sentiments did not undergo the same variations of cloud and sunshine as those which have just been noticed, and this was a young and fair-haired girl of twenty. In the morning—some two hours before the Prussian entry—there had driven into O—— a well-appointed carriage, drawn by two horses, and bearing an old gentleman and his daughter. This carriage stopped at a chemist's shop, then at a surgical-bandage maker's, and lastly at one of those dépôts where the appurtenances of a private ambulance might be bought—lint, linen, camp-beds, &c. ; and at all these places the old man and the young girl were received with marks of particular respect. It is true that the carriage displayed a coronet on its panels, which may account, in some way, for this deference; but it is also certain that the young girl was divinely beautiful, and that had she been anybody else but a duke's daughter, it would have made little difference in the amount or in the quality of the homage which men would have strewed upon her path. There are faces towards which all men feel drawn, and whose claims to absolute worship nobody calls in question. Hers was one of them. It was a face that would have made a craven feel chivalrous, and would have spurred a naturally honourable man to deeds of valour or sacrifice such as those of which legends tell. On the other hand, Heaven help the man who should fall in love with such a face and not have

his love requited ! His life would become a torment, for he could never forget those features, with their sweet, grave expression—never !

The Duke—a slight, thin-visaged man of about sixty, who walked with a stiff knee and leaned for support on a stick—was essentially a French nobleman of that school who have sent the present age to Coventry. A Legitimist he was ; not cynical or morose, but one of those who can feel no sort of sympathy for modern ideas ; are intimately persuaded that they will all break down ; and, pending this consummation, hold aloof, washing their hands of politics and of everything else which may bring them into active contact with a world which they neither understand nor esteem. One could read his character, his prejudices, his proclivities on his face as in an open book. He was dignified, but cold ; his manners were marked by the most perfect courtesy, but—except when he was talking to persons of his own rank—there was in them just the slightest tincture of sarcasm, as if he were constantly expecting that his interlocutor was going to commit himself to some outrageous proposition, and as if his not doing so were a matter of surprise to him. It is superfluous to mention that although in the month of October 1870, France was already in the enjoyment of Republican institutions, nobody would have ventured to address the Duke otherwise than by his title. Thrones might fall and constitutions vanish, kings or emperors might be deposed and Frenchmen citizenise one another to their hearts' content ; but throughout all changes and chances this nobleman was Duc de Bressac, and meant to remain so.

“Then I will have all those articles sent up to the

castle, Monsieur le Duc," said the shopman of the ambulance dépôt obsequiously, as he escorted the noble customer and his daughter back to their carriage, after they had remained more than an hour making purchases.

"If you please, M. Galuche," said the Duke, hoisting himself into the carriage by the aid of his stick and his footman's arm.

"And you will try to let us have them as early as possible, M. Galuche," added Mademoiselle de Bressac, in a pleading voice.

"They shall be at the castle as soon as ever the roads are clear, Mademoiselle," answered florid M. Galuche, bowing low; and so saying, he drew out his watch. "It is now close upon twelve, Mademoiselle—as the troops are to enter in another half-hour, it would scarcely be safe to send now; the roads must be already blocked."

"But I thought the entry was not to commence till two," exclaimed the Duke in surprise. "I had timed our coming so that we might get all our shopping done, and be back before they came in."

"There was a countermand last night, M. le Duc," replied the shopkeeper, renewing his bows. "The troops were not to have come in till the afternoon. Yesterday we were enjoined to be in readiness to receive them at twelve o'clock."

M. Galuche had no very cogent reasons for detesting the war, for it had developed his particular branch of commerce in a way that was most satisfactory, and commerce was what M. Galuche naturally regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of man's aims and thoughts here below. Nevertheless, finding himself in the presence of M. de Bressac,

whose views were probably not commercial, he felt it binding upon him to show that the ancient patriotism of the citizens of O—— had not degenerated in his person, so he pursued with sudden lugubriousness: "Yes, twelve o'clock—a terrible event this for our good town of O——, M. le Duc. I, for my part, have to lodge six of these brigands in my house—I received the billet-order this morning. Six of them!" and he drew, or pretended to draw, a sigh, very miserably.

"What are we to do now?" asked M. de Bressac perplexedly of his daughter. "We shall have to remain here half the day."

"If M. le Duc will so far honour me," broke in M. Galuche, with alacrity, "I have a drawing-room above my shop where Mademoiselle could sit whilst the army was marching by. There is a capital view from the window."

"God forbid!" cried the Duke, biting his lips as if he had had a spasm; and to the unspeakable chagrin of M. Galuche he saw a look of pain flit over the nobleman's features, and indignation flash from the eyes of Mdlle. de Bressac.

"I—a—of course did not mean that Mademoiselle should look at the march-past; that I know—a—would be too—too—distressing," blundered he, in a luckless endeavour to rectify his mistake. "I only intended to pray that Mademoiselle would do me the honour of accepting a shelter in my house, and partaking of such humble refreshment as it is in my power to offer."

But M. Galuche was saved the trouble of further apology by a loud flourish of trumpets which resounded at the end

of the street. This, he explained, had been announced the day before as a signal that the thoroughfares through which the army was to pass were instantaneously to be cleared of all their vehicles ; and in effect, a minute or two later a squad of Uhlans—part of the garrison that had been holding the town for a few days past—debouched at the upper end of the street, rode down it at an amble, and directed the Duke's coachman to draw up his carriage in a by-lane. The coachman, being English, obeyed without a word ; but the footman being French, and old, could not submit to this order without having recourse to the solace of numerous shrugs, muttered oaths, and argumentative pleas, to all of which demonstrations the silent, armed Uhlans paid as much attention as if he had said nothing. Under their directions the carriage was stationed in a small street that led out of the main one, and it was from this point that the Duke and his daughter became the unwilling spectators of the saddest scene which can be given to loyal and patriot eyes.

At first M. de Bressac threw himself back in his seat without glancing either to the right or left of him, and his daughter did the same, neither speaking. But soon a kind of fascination drew the young girl's face to the window. She looked fixedly, yearningly, and with a sickening expression of sorrow ; and insensibly hot tears began to course each other down her cheeks, whilst her frame trembled as if from cold.

Nobody who has not felt it can realise the sensation of seeing one's country invaded. As Mdlle. de Bressac looked, it seemed to her as if she were draining a cup of humiliation bitter enough and deep enough for a life-time. No private

sorrow could ever touch her like this. Her mother's death, which had been the one great grief of her young life, had moved her less ; the loss of her father, if she lived to suffer it, could not, she thought, cause her pangs more acute and lasting. The soldiers tramped by, the guns jolted over the paving-stones, the hoofs of the horses struck the ground with almost rhythmical cadence ; and these sounds, so stirring when it is a friendly cavalcade that produces them, shot throes of positive physical pain through her heart. At last she could bear it no longer, and, shivering all over, drew her head in. As she did so, she involuntarily glanced up, and her eyes encountered those of a Prussian officer, who had been gazing at her as if spellbound for more than half-an-hour.

He was a young man of about six-and-twenty, of strikingly handsome features, and eyes remarkably intelligent and mild. The tasteful light-blue uniform with white facings which he was wearing set off to advantage his strong, well-knit figure, and he bestrode a powerful charger with ease and grace. Probably he was acting in some sort as marshal, for though Mdlle. de Bressac had not noticed him, he had early taken up his position in the street where the carriage stood, and, in company with six mounted soldiers, seemed to be there to keep the crowd back. No doubt, his first glance at the beautiful occupant of the brougham had been of the kind which most men throw at pretty women ; but if so, it had quickly changed. The light look of levity in his eyes faded from them, and gave place to an air of generous and manly sympathy as he watched the lovely face bathed in tears, and marked the keen traces of anguish on the young girl's features.

He threw a glance behind him to see if it would not be possible to take the carriage out of its position, and spare its owners the rest of the sight ; but the alley was a blind one, and its single issue was now closed. Perceiving this, the young officer turned his eyes again with increasing pity on the weeping face, and did not take them off. He gazed at the girl with an admiration that slowly grew every minute, and which at last became so trance-like that when, towards the end, Mdlle. de Bressac withdrew her face from the carriage window and caught his eyes, he started as if from a dream, and, without appearing conscious of what he was doing, raised his white-gloved hand to his helmet, and bowed as if he were saluting a queen.

Mdlle. de Bressac did not return this salute. Coming from such a quarter, and under such circumstances, it seemed to her an insult, and caused her to flush up to the eyes. The officer had time to perceive that flush, and to guess the meaning of it, and he slightly changed colour. In a few minutes more the triumphal procession was over, and the carriage was enabled to move away. The young Prussian followed it with his eyes until it vanished round the corner of the street.

Then—no longer the same man as he had been an hour before, for what transformations may not be compassed in an hour?—he slowly rode off with his men in search of the quartermaster, to ascertain where his billet was. On his way he was far too much absorbed to notice, what he certainly would have, and *had* remarked that same morning, that more than one Frenchwoman turned round to look at him as he rode past, and to remark, “ Qu’il n’avait pas mauvaise tournure pour un Prussien.”

The quartermaster was standing in front of the town-house with lists in his hand, and a very mob of officers pressing round him. With more respect for the new applicant than his military rank actually warranted, for the young man was but a captain, the high functionary said to him, "Herr Hauptmann, your quarters will be good ones. You are one of a party of twenty who will lodge at the Château de Bressac." Then, in a whisper, "Fine house and capital cellar, Herr Graf. The Duke is one of the richest men in this country, and his daughter, they say, is"—

But the arrival of more officers cut the remark short, and the captain had to turn his horse again. When out of the throng, he called to a workman who was leaning against a post, looking very much as if he had been consoling himself for his country's misfortunes with absinthe, and asked him for information as to where the château was.

"The Château de Bressac is not quite a league off," hiccoughed the Frenchman, with a praiseworthy attempt to look dignified and sober. "You have only to follow the road straight, and, with that horse of yours, you ought to catch up the Duke's carriage, which was here ten minutes ago. Ay, a carriage with soft cushions like mattresses," added he, drawlingly. "A pretty thing for aristos like that to be dragged about under a Republic when good fellows like myself go on foot."

"Was it a carriage drawn by a pair of bays, and with a lady inside?" asked the Prussian.

"Ay, that's it—two bays that are fed better than many a good Republican, I'll be bound; and the lady inside was Mdlle. Fleur de Lys, the Duke's daughter."

The officer put his hand into his pocket, and threw the man a napoleon.

II.

Mdlle. Fleur de Lys, or Mdlle. Lili, as people more affectionately called her, was the only child of the Duke de Bressac. She had had a brother, but he died in boyhood, and since then she had been the object upon whom all her father's affection, pride, and ambition centred. A love such as that which her father bore her would have been enough to spoil most children, but it had not spoiled her. Though she ruled supreme at Bressac, where her least whim was law, she exercised her sovereignty sensibly, and was not renowned anywhere about the country for capriciousness or eccentricity. The only thing people said about her was that she was proud—"kind-hearted, but proud," was their term; and this estimate of her character was no bad one, if by pride was meant that she had a shrinking horror of everything that was mean or commonplace, and set up for herself an ideal of human nature that was as much above the real thing as heaven is above the earth. This was, indeed, the rock upon which a good deal of Mdlle. Lili's future peace was likely to split; for ideals are dangerous things in the navigation of life. Mdlle. Lili could not understand that the purest of human natures, like the purest of coins, contain some small particle of alloy. Having passed all the leisure hours of her girlhood reading the books of chivalry with which the old library of the castle was stored, and having ever present before her eyes the example of her own father, whose scrupulousness was so nice that it almost amounted to the pedantry of honour, she would have had

every man be wholly brave, generous, courteous, and disinterested. And the worst of it was, that she gave every man credit for these qualities before knowing him, whence it would happen that as few men—or, to speak more correctly, none—ever did full honour to the list of virtues with which she had debited them, she generally relegated them, after a few days' acquaintance, to the obscurest background of her thoughts, amongst things tried and found wanting. This was the reason why, at twenty, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys was not yet married. Suitors had wooed her in plenty ; but one had seemed not quite brave ; a second was too fond of money ; a third's manners were bad ; a fourth was brave and disinterested enough, but was prone to tattle ; and so on. It must be said that, in dismissing her suitors, Mdlle. de Bressac never did so in a way that could shock them, or make them guess that they had displeased her. She was not only too well bred, but too kind and compassionate, to cause anybody wilful pain. Only when a lover failed to come up to her standard of perfection, he simply found that he made no progress in his wooing—that was all.

On coming back to Bressac from the town of O——, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys was in a state of feverish agitation, such as her father had never known her in before. What most shocked her in the cruel spectacle of the morning was the attitude of the inhabitants. "To think," cried she, clasping her hands in an intensity of bitterness—"to think that there were young men in those crowds, men of twenty and thirty, who were not ashamed to come out on the pavements to stare at our enemies and jeer at them ! To jeer, when they had not the courage to fight ! Oh, cowardice, treble cowardice of men ! Where has

all the chivalry of France flown? Why, in a war like this, every house ought to have become a fortress, every village a citadel. Battlements? What need had we of them if our men had been fearless and resolved to face death, as the women and children of Saragossa did in fighting against us? France outdone in valour by a small Spanish town! We are not only beaten, we are dishonoured. No woman will ever be able to look at Frenchmen and feel proud of them. We have fallen so low in spirit, that fifty years hence men will ask of what clay their fathers were made to have patiently stood all this." Here she broke out into sobs, and her father tried to appease her; but it was not much of an effort, for the Duke was too painfully disgusted himself with the tameness shown by his countrymen to be able to find many excuses for them. Those degrading hauls, as he called them, of a hundred thousand armed prisoners at a time, those meek surrenders of large cities, those incredible acts of subservience on the part of corporate bodies, and, worse than all, the rampant bragging of press and public orators, which added ridicule to what was already contemptible enough, filled him with dismay. All that he could find as a palliation for so much shame was the argument that France had become crazed, and was no longer herself. "The people have gone speech-mad," he would say resignedly. "When we see a country like this being governed by a dozen cracked barristers, it means that the age of action is past. Government, nowadays, signifies quibbling. The first time a nation of fighting men turns round on us, we must obviously go to the wall, as we are doing now. And it is useless organising armies," added he. "Why should

peasants or workmen go out to fight? The barristers who govern us have taught them that there is no such thing as God, no religion, no family, no property; that all men are equal, and owe no respect to one another; that all nations are one, and that the idea of a separate allegiance to a mother country is an antiquated barbarism. Good—then why risk one's life? If there is nothing in one's country worth defending, if a man is to worship only himself, then the soundness of his own skin must evidently be his paramount object, and he had better see to it." Nevertheless, the Duke had subscribed largely to the organisation of the armies in which he did not believe; and he would certainly have enlisted himself, had it not been for his lameness (due to a wound in a duel twenty years before), which precluded his being of any use. As it was, he would have been quite ready to defend his own castle; but he and his daughter would have had to defend it alone, for at the first hint of barricading the castle, the servants had with one voice declared their intention of being no participators in such rashness. To be sure, there was one dissentient—the English coachman. Judging the thing from a cool and phlegmatic point of view, this functionary expressed his readiness to fight if his Grace pleased, but "didn't see the use of it."

Happily Mdlle. de Bressac had domestic details to attend to on her return from O——, which obliged her to rouse herself from the state of prostration to which the morning's events had reduced her. Declining to join in the popular cry as to Prussian brigands, clock-robbers, and the rest of it, the Duc de Bressac had decided that the officers billeted upon him should be received with all the regard due to

valiant opponents. It was only a lawyers' government, he said, which could seek to traduce courageous enemies by accusing them of filching. So Mdlle. Fleur de Lys had to see that the twenty best bed-rooms in the castle and all the state apartments were prepared as though to receive honoured guests, the Duke merely reserving for himself and his daughter a small suite of rooms in the most retired part of the house. Then, when this was done, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys donned a white apron and went into a wing of the castle which had been converted into an ambulance, and where half-a-dozen French officers and soldiers, wounded in the battle near O——, were being tended. Amongst the private soldiers was a cousin of Mdlle. de Bressac's, the Marquis de Criquetot.

He was fairly rich, this pale marquis of eight-and-twenty, and during the halcyon period of the Second Empire had devoted his mind to horse-racing. He was generally to be met with either at Chantilly or Newmarket, with an eyeglass screwed carefully into his left eye, a dust-coat thrown over his arm, and the gilt clasp of a betting-book peeping out of his breast-pocket. There were few races run without a horse of his appearing at the post, and few horses of his appeared at the post without being beaten. This, however, did not seem to interfere much with his enjoyment of the sport, and he continued a fervent follower of it, until one summer, being on a visit to Bressac, he was so smitten with his cousin's charms, that he forthwith sold his stud, discarded his eyeglass, threw his betting-book into the fire, and begged permission of the Duke to sue for his daughter's hand. He was in the very midst of his courtship when the war broke out. Thinking the army would swallow up

the Prussians easily enough without him, he did not in the first instance stir; but after Woerth, when Government appealed to all the men of goodwill in France, Mdlle. Fleur de Lys sent him to enlist as a private soldier, and away he went just as he would have gone and thrust his head into a cannon's mouth had she bidden him. He fought at Sedan and was taken prisoner, but escaped. Then he joined an army in course of formation in the provinces, and conducted himself with such gallantry, that M. Gambetta offered him a colonelcy, which he declined, and the cross of honour, which he accepted. At the battle of O——, a bullet discharged from a Bavarian rifle fractured his collar-bone, and for the moment cut his military career short.

Had the young soldier been in any other ambulance, there is no doubt he might have repined over this mishap, but as things were he managed to bear up. His wound was not dangerous, only troublesome and requiring rest, and this rest he gave it by lounging on a sofa with his right arm in a sling, smoking a good deal, and when his cousin or his uncle were not there to talk with him, reading novels. He was engaged in this way when Fleur de Lys de Bressac glided into his room with one of the potions which doctors prescribed for him, and which he drank with faith because she mixed them. Dressed in black merino, with neat white collar and cuffs, and her rich masses of auburn hair sheltered by a small white crape cap, she looked as sweet a personification of an ambulance nurse as it was possible to conceive. Moving across the room with noiseless steps, she came to her cousin's side and laid down her tray on the table near him; then in the gentle voice that

always made him thrill, she said : " Do you feel better, mon cousin ? "

He had thrown away his cigarette and laid down his book on her entrance.

" I always feel better when you are here, and relapse when you are out of sight," he answered, half-seriously, half-gaily. " But tell me, cousin, your eyes are red ; you have been crying ? "

" Yes," she said, with a faint sigh, and began to stir his potion in its teacup. " Cousin, you must drink this. It is a little bitter, but the doctor says it will make you sleep."

He quaffed the drug as if it had been the divinest nectar, taking several draughts to make the pleasure last longer. Then he wiped his lips and exclaimed : " It is better than burgundy, cousin."

Whilst he was drinking, Fleur de Lys had mechanically taken up the book he had been reading. It was one of M. Théophile Gautier's popular productions. On seeing the title she laid it down again and turned a silent but eloquent glance of surprise and sorrow at him : " Novelettes !" she said at length, " I did not think you could have the heart to read such things as this now."

He did not seem to understand, and held the handkerchief he had been carrying to his lips midway in the air, astonished : " Why, it's a volume of Gautier's, cousin."

" Gautier's tales, whilst the Prussians are flaunting their standard in our town of O——, whilst they are on their way to take up their quarters in this very house !" she rejoined. " I can see, cousin, that the modern

doctrines of internationalism must have struck very deep if a man of your birth feels so lightly for his country's ruin."

He turned red, and answered, a little abashed: "Don't be hard on me, cousin. Time hangs so heavy on my hands when you are not here, that I must needs find a way of killing it. Besides, I have not read much; see, here is the book-marker in the third page. I always think of something else whilst I am reading now."

"And there is only one thing of which you should think," she replied coldly: "the preparing yourself for the day when we shall avenge these outrages that have been put upon us. Who is to set the example of regenerating our country if not our class? You refused a colonelcy on the field because you said you were not fit for it, and if you thought so you acted honourably. But why do you not fit yourself? If I were a man I would not rest until I had learned military tactics and the language of our enemies, so as to be ready for the day when we shall re-invade *their* country."

There was a pause. The young soldier looked dejectedly at his bandaged arm, and stroked his forehead thoughtfully with his free hand.

"I am afraid I belong to a poor generation, cousin," he said, in a low voice. "But you must guide me. I can do what I am told to do, and I will obey you. This is the last time I shall open a novel until I have learned German and the drill-book."

"If every gentleman in France did the same, you would be revenged in less than five years," she exclaimed, with vehemence.

"Perhaps every gentleman in France would, if he had you to command him, cousin," was his smiling answer; and as Fleur de Lys's hand still rested on the table, he raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"Yes, but you will not have discharged all your duty, cousin," she continued, gently disengaging herself, "even when you have repaid our enemies, blow for blow, all they have done to us. A gentleman should devote himself to exterminating those blasphemous and disloyal theories that have brought us so low. What they call universal suffrage is an impiety. It is handing over a great nation, with traditions and a name, to the custody of all who are ignorant, debased, and corrupt. The people are like children. They should be ruled and protected against themselves by the classes who have education and religion."

This time the marquis's face assumed a rather rueful expression. "I make no doubt of our soon turning the tables upon the Prussians," he remarked; "but to wage a war against universal suffrage is—is"——

"Is what?" she asked, proudly.

But he was spared the unpleasantness of explaining what he meant; for at that moment there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered. It was the same footman who had driven into O—— with the carriage in the morning; one of those old French servants dressed in impossible liveries that never fit them, and with a grumbling, patronisingly familiar tone, that always makes one doubt whether they are not going to sit down by your side after handing the dishes round. On the strength of his having been an incalculable number of years in the family, this footman felt himself privileged to act chorus, as it

were, to all the conversations carried on within his hearing. Before the war, he had been generally regarded as a successful copy of Caleb Balderstone, whose virtues would prove to be shining gold on the day of trial; but when the day of trial came, in the shape of the Duke's proposal to entrench himself in his castle, and defend it to the last drop of his own and his servants' blood, Jean-Baptiste Barbecruche revealed unmistakably that, if he liked the Duke, there was somebody he loved still better, and that was himself. Nevertheless, he was not aware that his candid display of egotism had disappointed anybody, or cooled in the smallest degree his employer's faith in his perfections; so that it was in much his usual tone of having pondered the orders he had been commissioned with, and being unable to vouchsafe them his approval, that, addressing his young mistress, he said:—"Mademoiselle, M. le Duc has sent me to say that he begs you to come downstairs and assist him in receiving those Prussians. To receive those people in state, can you understand that? For my part, it disgusts me; and I said to M. le Duc, 'Rather than face a Prussian, Monseigneur, I would shut myself up in the kitchen, and live there six weeks.' But Monseigneur purposes to hand over all his keys to them, and to beg their permission to live in retirement during their presence. Beg their permission, forsooth! just as if they were masters, and we, the owners of the castle, were nobodies! Said I to Monsieur le Duc, 'Truly things have come to a pretty pass, Monseigneur, when I, an old servant, receive such orders as that!' But Monseigneur told me to mind my own business; and he begs, Mademoiselle, that you will

not delay, as a detachment of officers were already riding up the avenue. Yes, and I saw them myself through a window coming up—a jolter-headed lot, with cannibal faces; scoundrels that'll be getting drunk off our wines, and sprawling with their muddy boots on our best beds. Ah, the scamps, the cut-throats, the"—

"I think that is enough," cried Mdle. de Bressac, stopping him with a wave of the hand, and turning on him a glance of cool contempt. "You will have earned the right to insult those soldiers, Jean-Baptiste, when you have had the spirit to defy them. Meanwhile, you will have to learn this lesson, that those who have not the heart to fight, must have the courage to slave. During all the time that the Prussian officers remain in this house, you will wait upon them every day, and do it respectfully. If you prefer shutting yourself up in a kitchen, you are free to follow your choice, but you will select some other kitchen than that of Bressac."

A lashing with a whip could not have more completely disconcerted and cowed the unfortunate Jean-Baptiste. He opened his lips to speak; but meeting the eyes of his mistress fixed on him implacably, as if awaiting an answer, he judged it prudent to say nothing. It was only when Mdle. de Bressac had swept out of the room, after nodding slightly to her cousin, that he summed up his impressions by lifting his hands ceiling-wards and exclaiming, "Bandits de Prussiens! It's they who are the cause of all this. If our poltroon army had only fought like men! But soldiers are hares, nowadays. In my time it was very different!" And forgetting the wounded Marquis de Criquetot, who had enjoyed the benefit of this

remark, and was smiling at it, he repeated, "Ay, ay, very different!" and shuffled, mumbling, downstairs.

Half an hour later the entrance-hall of Bressac was the scene of a gathering such as the old walls of the castle, and the pictures of mailed knights that hung upon them, must have witnessed with a stupefaction unparalleled in the course of their inanimate existence. The Duke de Bressac, attired in black, and with his daughter by his side, was standing at a table on which lay a few large keys. Behind him, in a half circle, were ranged his household; and facing this group thronged a showy cluster of Prussian officers, whose steel spurs and heavy scabbards clanked on the marble of the tessellated flooring. There had been a little uneasiness on the faces of these officers as they neared the castle. They were not sure what kind of reception would be given them; and though quite able and ready to over-ride sulkiness, or any other form of active or passive antagonism, they naturally preferred that their relations with such a man as the Duke de Bressac should be exempt from disagreeable incidents. And in this they were not disappointed. The Duke bowed to them with courtesy, and was answered by that peculiarly formal yet not ungraceful salute which is in usage in the Prussian army. Then, speaking to them in his own tongue and with a voice that quavered but little, all things considered, he said,—

"Gentlemen, the hazards of war have brought you as masters into a house where, under other circumstances, I should have been glad to receive you as guests. I shall not importune you much with my presence whilst you are here, for my daughter and I will beg your permission to keep to

our own apartments; but the rest of the house will be yours. My steward has orders to take your pleasure, and will deliver you these keys. This particular key (and he drew one from his pocket) is that of a gallery of heirlooms. You will allow me, General, to remit it to you in person." And, stepping forward, he tendered it to the chief officer present, who turned it over once or twice in his hands, reddened—but eventually pocketed it.

A pin might have been heard to drop whilst this scene was being enacted. Then the Duke gave his arm to his daughter and made for the door, the officers parting in two rows to the right and left of them, and raising their hands to their helmets. But just as the party were on the threshold an officer darted out of the throng, picked up a glove which had been left on the table, and, hurrying after Mdle. de Bressac, said in French, "You have forgotten your glove, Mademoiselle."

She bent her head to thank him, and recognised the same officer whom she had seen that morning. He also wore the same expression on his face which had displeased her then. But somehow it did not displease her now, for, stopping to take the glove from his hand, she noticed that that hand shook, and that there were tears in his eyes.

III.

"I cannot make out what has come over Leoneizen," exclaimed fat Hauptmann Maximilian Koch, some six weeks after this, one evening at mess in the castle dining-room.

"Very singular," protested another fat Hauptmann,

Ferdinand von Schweippe, cutting up a plump and tender quail ; "he doesn't eat."

"Nor drink," ejaculated a third Hauptmann, rosy and tall, raising to his lips a glass of the Duke de Bressac's rubiest claret.

"The fact is," laughed handsome, slim-waisted Lieutenant von Wespe, with a glance round him to see that there were none but his brother officers present,— "the fact is, Leoneizen is in love. I am sure of it."

"A man who is in love should eat and drink twice more than a man who isn't, for love wastes," remarked tremendously corpulent Colonel Herr Graf von Wurstspatzen ; and as he was the presiding officer that evening, and had laughed whilst uttering his joke, all the other officers laughed with him in concert. This, by the way, is the rule. A colonel laughs, everybody laughs. Discipline could not exist without it.

"But whom does he love?" inquired Hauptmann Koch, between two mouthfuls of game.

"Yes, let's have the name!" gobbled the second fat Hauptmann, much relishing his plump bird.

"Ah, that's *his* secret," laughed the slim Lieutenant. "One mustn't betray."

"A love-secret is no secret," exclaimed the tall and rosy Hauptmann, helping himself to more claret. "Those things always transpire."

"And if they don't, the parties best pleased are not always the lovers themselves," observed the corpulent Colonel, with a new laugh. At which the whole table guffawed again like one man.

"Since the Herr Colonel is of that opinion, I may as

well say that one need not have many pairs of eyes to guess who is the beauty that has turned our friend's head," sniggered the slim Lieutenant.

"I have guessed already," said, with a broad smile, Hauptmann Otto Nädelaugen, a penetrating round-faced Hauptmann, with spectacles. "It is"——

"Hush!" whispered all the officers together; for the door had opened, and the footman, Jean-Baptiste Barbecruche, was sailing in with a tray covered with sweet dishes. By this time J. B. Barbecruche had thought better of his resolution of never facing the Prussians. Between his patriotism and the prospect of losing his place at Bressac the worthy man had not long hesitated. His sentiments had even flown with rapidity from one extreme to the other, and he now got on capitally with cannibal-visaged foemen whom his French soul had execrated. He was garrulous, civil, and confidential, and was good enough to patronise his new masters as he had done his old ones.

"*Charlotte Russe*, or *Plom-pouding au rhom*, Monsieur le Comte?" he asked, pausing on the Colonel's left; "let me advise Monsieur le Comte to try the *plom-pouding*; our *chef* has excelled himself."

"You don't happen to have seen M. le Capitaine de Leoneizen, have you, M. Jean-Baptiste?" asked the penetrating Hauptmann with the spectacles. "He is missing at our board."

"Pardon me, mon Capitaine, M. le Comte de Leoneizen was seated in the Pagoda Garden, drawing, almost all the afternoon. It is true that at dusk I lost sight of him. Perhaps he is gone to the town."

"Perhaps," echoed Hauptmann Nädelaugen. But when M. Jean-Baptiste had retired, after disposing of his dainties and uncorking more bottles of Pomard, Chambertin, and Château Lafitte, the same Hauptmann re-exclaimed, with his spectacles beaming, "The Pagoda Garden! This is the twentieth time I have seen or heard of Leoneizen in the Pagoda Garden. It is that which adjoins the private orchard, where the snow-like Fräulein Fleur de Lys takes her walks; also there is a footpath skirting it, which leads to the village of Bressac, where the Fräulein goes often to tend the sick."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the officers.

"Heh! heh!" winked the Colonel. "Nädelaugen talks as if he had been reconnoitring the enemy's citadel on his own account, and found it already invested." At which pleasantry, as usual, there was an immense deal of merriment. "However," continued the Herr Colonel von Wurstspatzen, filling his glass, "if one of the King's officers can carry back to Germany as his bride the Fräulein Fleur de Lys, he will have made his Majesty present of as fair a subject as any in all beautydom. It will be a conquest like Metz. Here's to the health of the conqueror!" and the good-humoured corpulent Count von Wurstspatzen drained his glass dry and smacked his lips after it.

Of course, everybody followed suit in the toast, for, as in laughing, so in drinking; when the Colonel drinks everybody drinks, this being a necessity of discipline. But when the penetrating Hauptmann with the spectacles had set back his glass on the tablecloth, after exclaiming, "To the conqueror!" he turned his shining spectacles on his superior, and said, grinning: "I have drunk, Herr Colonel,

but I do not think it is one of us who will carry away the fair Fräulein. That wounded Marquis, who is our prisoner on parole, the Herr von Criquetot, seems to think and dream only of her—yet, to be sure, she does not appear to think only of him. They are cousins, and go as brother and sister together.”

“I saw them walking in the garden the other day, he with his right arm in a sling, she leaning on the other arm,” remarked the tall, rosy Hauptmann, who had become more rosy still from the claret. “There is that in a woman’s mere way of walking with a man,” added he, pensively, “which soon whispers to the observer whether she is in love or not—and the Fräulein Fleur de Lys is not in love with the Herr Criquetot.”

“The Herr Criquetot is learning German and drilling,” observed the slim Lieutenant von Wespe, as if he thought the thing a good joke. “He stammers German with everybody he can find, and it has got about through these French servants, who spy their masters so well, that he is doing this to please the Fräulein his cousin, and in view of the ‘*jour de la revanche!*’” And the slim Lieutenant struck what he conceived to be a French attitude of “*revanche!*” by waving one hand above his head and making his eye-balls flame.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed all the officers together, greatly amused.

“We are to hear, then, of the Field-Marshal Criquetot crossing the Rhine and besieging Mayence”—

“To take a ham,” interrupted the Colonel. And this joke was thought so transcendent that it provoked peal upon peal, and appropriately closed the banquet.

The officers were still laughing over the Field-Marshal Criquetot and his ham, when, with their caps jauntily perched on the side of their heads, and the middle buttons of their tight tunics unfastened, they sauntered into the conservatory, which led out of the dining-room, to take coffee and to smoke.

IV.

Meanwhile, the several persons who had been made the subjects of the mess-room conversation were engaged in their respective occupations, and for reasons best known to themselves were not so happy as their critics. The young Count Leoneizen, to begin with. Leaning against a tree, through the dry branches of which whistled a keen December wind, this young officer—for whom more than one female heart had beaten, and was, perhaps, beating then, unrequited, at Berlin or Cologne—was straining his eyes to see as far as possible in the night down a dark road, at the end of which twinkled, like one small lamp, the lights of the village of Bressac. Every night the Count Leoneizen came to this tree and gazed down the dark road, for every afternoon Mdlle. de Bressac, attended by her maid, went to the village to carry help and comfort to the sick or wounded, who were being tended in the cottages, and it was seldom that she returned before dusk. So every day the young officer, wrapped in his cloak, leaned against the tree to watch. It pleased him to think that he was in some way guarding over the safety of the woman he loved—that no one could harm her whilst he was there; that, unknown to her, a stout heart and a strong arm were surveying her footsteps, and waiting to

shield her at the cost of life from the slightest insult or danger. He had never spoken to her, and never tried to do so. He knew that his love was a hopeless one. Without exchanging a word with Fleur de Lys, he had convinced himself that, even if she were to love him above everything else on earth, she would never give him her hand. Three months before, Friedrich von Leoneizen had started upon the war flushed and eager with hopes of promotion and dignities: what were these to him now? What would he not have given could France and Germany have remained at peace—ay, even if he had never won an honour in his life, so that he should only have been free to woo Fleur de Lys as his wife? But it was no use wishing. The greatest happiness he could expect now was to come and watch for Fleur de Lys' going and coming every day. By these means he saw her five minutes in every twenty-four hours—and it was enough.

And yet there were days when his slight happiness was cruelly marred for him; and on the evening when his brother officers were making merry at his expense, he was leaning against his tree with all the pangs of jealousy gnawing at his heart. He could bear to think of Fleur de Lys never being his, but that she should become another's was a thought that maddened him. On this afternoon he had seen her for the third or fourth time go by, not with her maid, but with M. de Criquetot, who was now well enough to take short walks; and the handsome, strong, and amorous German did not easily imagine that Fleur de Lys could love such a dandified, insignificant person as this French marquis appeared to him to be; yet he knew

enough of French marriages to be aware that M. de Criquetot might very well win Mdle. de Bressac without her being more fond of him than of a pet lap-dog. So he clenched his fists till the nails almost ran into the flesh; and the wind seemed to him more bleak and moanful that night than ever; and the country around, enshrouded in its stillness, looked inexpressibly desolate and sepulchral.

But if Count Leoneizen was depressed, things fared little better with his French rival. In fact, they fared worse, for the German had at least the consolation of knowing that if his passion was hopeless, the fault was not his, but that of events; whereas the Marquis, who perceived that he was making no advance in his suit, was fain to adopt as the reason that he had not the qualities in him which make a man loved. Fleur de Lys was always kind to him. Her manner was gentle and sisterly; and he felt little doubt that if he asked her to be his wife, she would consent, to reward him for having gone so obediently and risked his life at her bidding. But he was too generous to require of her anything in the nature of a sacrifice. He wished to be loved, and, failing that, he had strength and chivalry enough to support his disappointment nobly. It is only little hearts that can bear a grudge against a woman for not loving them; generous minds have ever such a sense of their own inferiority beside the woman they worship, that they are prepared for indifference as almost their due. Yet Louis de Criquetot would have been glad to ascertain whether his cousin's indifference towards him was of a kind which might be dispelled by patience on his part, or whether her heart was engaged to anybody else.

All he knew was, that of late a change seemed to have come over her. She was quieter, more absorbed. Sometimes, sitting with work in her lap, she would pause five minutes between two stitches ; and during those five minutes, a vague, desponding expression would steal into her eyes, and she would gaze before her as if unconscious of anybody's presence. Then some movement would startle her, and make her resume her sewing, with a blush mantling on her cheek.

All these symptoms could be perceptible only to a lover's eyes. To others, Mdle. de Bressac was what she had always been ; though perhaps there were some of the more observant amongst the others who did notice that Mdle. de Bressac was not quite the same in her remarks upon the war as a month or two ago. The news of lost battles still made her turn pale ; at the recital of horrors suffered by the inhabitants of ruined villages she still shed tears of compassion ; but in talking with her cousin about the future of France, she no longer spoke of the necessity of Frenchmen being prepared to resist invasions, and seldom of the necessity of their invading others ; which change was naturally attributed to a prudent wish not to compromise herself in the hearing of any of those ubiquitous spies which Count Bismarck was supposed to hold in his service.

The Marquis had escorted his cousin to the village at her own request, because she thought that the walk might do him good ; otherwise he would not have intruded himself, for he was growing sensitive lest she might think he meant to importune her with his attentions. But the invitation, being the third or fourth in succession, had touched

and pleased him; and whilst Fleur de Lys was helping to dress the wound of a stalwart young cottager, whom a fragment of shell had laid low, he sat by a spluttering wood-fire, that was wreathing clouds of cheerless yellow smoke, and watched her.

Watched her as only lovers can watch, and with an aching heart to think that so much grace and beauty could never be his. The cottage was a wretchedly mean one—one of those hovels common in the centre and west of France, where a whole family are lodged in a single room, which has a stall in the corner of it for a cow. And yet Fleur de Lys' presence lit up this sty as if it were a palace chamber.

As she stood leaning over the sick man's bed, and applying bandages with the light touch and womanly care of one whose soul is in her work, she looked beautiful and lovable beyond what she had ever seemed to her cousin when dressed in silks and pearls. What jewels, indeed, can rival the lustre of a woman's eyes when performing an office of charity? M. de Criquetot, as he sat with his elbow resting on his knee and his head buried in his hand, thought with bitterness of his wasted life, which had sown in him the germ of no single great quality that could charm and win a noble woman. Whilst he was thus immersed in his reflections, the dressing of the wound came to an end, and the patient blurted out, in grateful but energetic *patois*, "You cannot think what good you are doing me, Mademoiselle!"

"May the Virgin bless you, my good young lady," took up the man's wife in a brogue quite as strong. "I sometimes think, though, you must be the blessed Virgin in person."

M. de Criqueot rose, and was assisting Fleur de Lys to put on her grey hood and cloak.

"You have everything you want now, Mère Marchelat?" she asked, buttoning the cloak, which covered her completely, like a nun's dress.

"Everything, Mademoiselle, thanks to Heaven and you. Monsieur Galuche, of the ambulance dépôt at O——, sent us more linen yesterday; and M. Jean Baptiste came down from the castle with wine this morning. Then, as to tobacco"—— But here the woman stopped short, and bit her lips as if she had committed a blunder.

"What about tobacco?" asked Mdlle. de Bressac; "Marchelat must smoke his pipe." And, drawing out her purse, she went up to an earthenware tobacco-jar that stood on a shelf, "This is to buy you tobacco; but mind, you must not smoke too much, mon ami." And saying this, she raised the lid of the jar, to drop her coin in; but the jar was already full to the brim, and sticking out of the fresh tobacco was the bowl of a new, handsomely-carved brier-root pipe.

The woman was biting the corner of her apron, the man in the bed looked sheepish.

"What a fine pipe!" exclaimed Mdlle. de Bressac, taking it out and examining it. "The carving of these figures on it is admirable; but it is not a French pipe. I have seen things like it—let me see, where? Yes, it was in the Hartz mountains of Germany." . . .

The woman, who had grown distressfully red, sprang forward, clasping her hands.

"Oh, forgive us, Mademoiselle. We know we did wrong; but we won't accept anything of them again!"

"Forgive you for what?" asked Fleur de Lys.

"I mean, Mademoiselle, you had made us all promise in the village, two months ago, when the Prussians were coming, that we would accept nothing whatever of them, but that when we had need of anything we should come to the castle for it; and believe me, Mademoiselle, we would never have taken anything from the others—no, we would sooner have died—but this one is not like the others; believe me, he is not."

"No," groaned the man in the bed; "he is not like the others."

Fleur de Lys restored the pipe to its place.

"Whom do you mean by 'this one'?" she inquired; and somehow it seemed to the Marquis that her voice trembled a little.

"We do not know his name," whimpered the woman, still distressed; "but he wears a light-blue coat, and has such a handsome face, and such mild eyes, that you would never take him for a Prussian. The other day, young Michel, the hump-backed son of our neighbour Ribot, fell down the sand-pit half-a-league off here, and his mother was almost beside herself after nightfall, when he didn't come back, and she couldn't learn what had become of him. Well, towards eleven, when the whole village were already talking about it, and running right and left to make inquiries, this Prussian arrived, carrying the hunchback in his arms, as if he had been a child. There was nothing but a sprained ankle; only Michel might have remained in the pit a week if the Prussian hadn't heard him shout, and scrambled down all amongst the mud and gravel to help him out. After that he took to coming every day to see

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the Ribots and to talk with Michel ; and that's how he got to hear of us. It's a sort of angel dressed up as a brigand, that Prussian is, Mademoiselle. He has all the gentleness of a woman with the strength of a lion, and when he talks to Marchelat, he says just the things that pick him up and prevent him from feeling down-hearted. Then he knows everything. He told us how to plant our vegetables in the garden there, so that they might get more of the sun and be bigger ; then he showed us that by hanging that sheet of tin slantwise under the mantel-shelf there, the chimney would leave off smoking ; and he got up himself on a ladder, and nailed that bit of board over the hole in the ceiling, where the rain used to come in. And for all that, he has that about him, Mademoiselle, that you never feel tempted to call him anything but Monsieur or Mon Capitaine. Ah, if Marchelat and his comrades had had officers like that, they would have been eating their soup in Berlin by this time."

Mdlle. de Bressac said nothing. There was only—her cousin remarked—a slight nervous shaking of her fingers as she fastened the last button of her cloak.

The woman Marchelat looked for a reply, and doubtless misinterpreting the expression of Fleur de Lys' face and the passing quiver of the lips, ejaculated, with sudden fire in her eyes, "But what is that Prussian to us, Mademoiselle, if we are to offend you by seeing him? Say but the word, and I fling this tobacco and pipe into the roadway, and never let the man cross our threshold again:" and with a spring she snatched the jar off the shelf, and dashed the casement open ready to throw——

But Fleur de Lys quickly stopped her. "No," she

faltered ; "keep the things, Mère Marchelat, and—and—continue to see this officer. I think we are a little late, mon cousin," added she hurriedly ; and bidding the cottagers a hasty good-night, she took her cousin's arm and hastened out.

There was no moon or stars ; the night was black, and seemed to threaten snow. Recent frosts had rendered the ground so hard that it was like treading on solid granite. For a few minutes, M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys walked along in silence. Why the Marquis kept silent he would have found it hard to explain ; but there is an instinct in these things which warns us when to speak and when to restrain ourselves. On her side, Fleur de Lys could not have spoken, if she would. The faculty of speech seemed for the moment to have forsaken her. So they proceeded together until M. de Criquetot abruptly paused, and said, as though remembering something, "By the way, cousin, we were to have gone to four cottages, and we have only been to three."

"Dear me ! We have forgotten the Merciers," she murmured, starting from her reverie. "I had promised to bring them a hundred francs for their cottage repairs, and they will be expecting me. But it is almost a kilomètre distant, I think."

"Yes," he answered, "and you are tired enough as it is, cousin. Cannot these people wait ?"

"They will be disappointed," she replied, shaking her head, "and perhaps be unhappy all the night."

"Well, if that is to be the case, I had better go and carry them the money myself. You can go back to

Marchelat's cottage, and rest there half-an-hour, and I will take you up on my return."

"But it is already seven," she exclaimed, opening her cloak to consult her watch, "and papa will be waiting dinner for us; he will feel alarmed." She hesitated some moments, and then added, "I think the best way, cousin, will be for you to carry the money, as you suggest, and I will walk on to the castle alone. The distance is not great, and the roads are safe. Nobody would hurt me."

"Hurt you, no," he rejoined, half to himself. "A man would be more than a fiend who could do that."

Still, safe as he believed the roads to be, he was naturally loth to abandon his cousin alone, and after dark; and began pondering whether there were no alternative between this and disappointing the Merciers. But he could hit upon nothing; so that, after reiterated assurances on the part of Fleur de Lys that she really was not afraid, but would go anywhere and at any hour confident in the chivalry of the neighbourhood, he received from her a small parcel she had made of her hundred francs, and set off with it, running.

Then she pursued her way alone.

And yet not alone; for how was it that on this particular road she felt secure, as she did on no other? How was it that though Friedrich Leoneizen had never been seen by her standing on his silent night-vigils, she was as conscious of his presence as though it had been revealed to her day after day by some visible token?

There had been no love-letters; no words exchanged.

His love had been voiceless, respectful, concealed. How was it that its least impulses were as well known to her as though they had been breathed into her ear by the tenderest language of passion? how was it that his inmost thoughts had echoed within her heart as if they had been whispered utterances?

Fleur de Lys walked along with her eyes cast on the ground and a quickening step. She felt the tutelary presence near her, following her, guarding her. She blushed and her heart throbbed; yet she must make no sign that she knew or felt anything. She must never let it be seen that the strong secret love that had twined itself round her being was known or suspected as it was.

So she walked, drawing her cloak close round her, and shivering a little, perhaps from the cold. And when she had gone some five hundred yards between the two stiff hedgerows that bordered the narrow way, she arrived at a turning. Here the road grew more narrow and more dark; but she continued bravely, and was not alarmed by the sight of two men who came tramping towards her with sticks and bundles over their shoulders, and pipes in their mouths. The men parted, one to either side of her, fingered the képis they were wearing, and wished her a rather queer good-night. Then they stopped, turned round to look after her, as if they were surprised to see a well-dressed woman out so late, removed the pipes from their mouths, and began to confer.

Evidently it was not an honest conference; one had only to look at the men to see that. The repeated defeats of the provincial armies had flooded the war-country with hordes of individuals, who, having been burned out of

house or home, and feeling little inclination to continue fighting for a hopeless cause, under generals in whom they had no faith, had given themselves up entirely to marauding. A much more dangerous class than the fiercest bands of Uhlans, were these gentry. They broke into deserted houses, attacked defenceless wayfarers, poached, plundered hen-roosts, and when booty was scarce, destroyed all they could lay hands on, fences, abandoned furniture, cottages, all apparently for the simple pleasure of the thing. It was easy to recognise these patriots by their bragging voices and their tattered military clothes; for the better part of them were Mobiles, and the worst scum of the routed armies. The two men who met Fleur de Lys were of this category. They must have been taken to serve against their will, and have seized the first convenient occasion for levanting; for both were young men, only weak striplings, blear-eyed and pale faced, like the lowest types of workmen in great cities.

Their conference did not last long. They shook the ashes out of their pipes, slipped the pipes into their pockets, and stealthily retraced their footsteps. Then Friedrich Leoneizen, whose watch-tree was precisely at the corner where the two roads joined, and whose eyes had from the first moment riveted themselves on the two vagabonds, crept noiselessly along under cover of the hedge and followed them. A great thrill of joy had gone through him as soon as the designs of these men had become evident. Fleur de Lys was alone; he would protect her. Glancing at his supposed antagonists, and then on his own powerful limbs, he could not help laughing a short grim laugh, saying

to himself: "If you venture to touch a hair of her head, if you so much as speak an uncivil word to her, I pity you." And with this he unfastened the clasp of his cloak, so as to be unhampered.

The two tramps accosted Fleur de Lys and whined: "Have pity on two poor soldiers who are wounded and have not got enough to carry them home, Madame."

"Two soldiers who have fought in all the battles of this war, Madame," took up the scraggiest of the two.

Without a trace of fear on her countenance, Fleur de Lys turned round, drew out her purse, and was in the act of opening it, when the man who had last spoken made a grab at it and snatched it out of her hand; whilst the second raised his fist to strike the young girl and push her back. But this second performer had reckoned without his host, for before his hand had had time to descend, or even to move an inch, Friedrich Leoneizen had sprung through the hedge, and with a terrific back-hand blow with the pommel of his sword, which he had disdained to unsheath, caused the man to measure his full length on the ground. Then catching the other fellow by the throat, he gripped him so tight between his lithe hands that the unhappy wretch's tongue protruded from his mouth and his eyes from their sockets. At the third tough grip he was lying beside his compeer, doubled up like an empty sack, and senseless. All this was done in less than half a minute; and then the Prussian, passing in one instant from the extreme of rage to the extreme of calm, stood deferentially uncovered and holding out her purse to Fleur de Lys.

"Here is your purse, Mademoiselle. You have not been over-frightened, I trust?"

"Thank you, Monsieur," she said in a low voice, and pressing her hand to her side ; but she did not answer the latter part of his question.

"Will you do me the honour to accept my arm for the rest of the way?" he continued, or rather faltered, for emotion was beginning to gain on him.

With a slight inclination of the head she signed to him that she would. He was then stooping over the bodies of his foes, to see how much injury he had done them.

"There is no vital harm," he remarked, after a moment's inspection. But he drew out his handkerchief and began bandaging one of the men's heads. Then he fetched his cloak to make them both a sort of bed under the hedge, where they could lie until relief was sent them. All this was done with a quiet spirit of humanity that had no ostentation in it, but for that reason was the more striking. Fleur de Lys was very pale, and watched all his movements with an expression which would have strangely cleared his brow and made his heart leap could he have seen it. But he saw nothing. Intent on his work, he loosened the men's collars, bathed their foreheads with water from the ditch ; and it was only when he had done everything that could be of any use that he rose, with an apology for having detained her so long, and offered her his arm.

She was going to take it ; but, looking into his face before doing so, she held out her hand and said simply, "You have a noble heart."

It was too dark to see whether Friedrich Leoneizen turned pale, or coloured, but he sank on one knee and pressed Mdle. de Bressac's hand to his lips. When he

rose his eyes were glistening, and there was a modest yet proud smile on his features, which spoke more gratefully than the deepest tribute of spoken thanks.

"Yes," continued Fleur de Lys, in frank, firm accents, "why should I scruple to say what I feel? There is war between our countries, and for long years we must be enemies. But when you return home, Monsieur, it may be gladness to you to reflect that you at least have not left only ruins and tears behind you."

His voice was sad as he replied: "Enemies, Mademoiselle—must we always be enemies? Will there not be a time when the events of this unhappy year will be forgotten?"

They were then passing near a cottage which had been destroyed by shells. Its roof was gone, large holes were in its walls; the place where the garden had stood was a heap of charred bricks. Mdlle. de Bressac silently pointed to this. The Prussian sighed.

"I have been told that sixty-five years ago the village near my own home was like that," he said, and at these words he felt Mdlle. de Bressac start. "My mother has often related to me how, being a child, she was carried out at night from a burning house, where her father and mother had both been killed. This was during the Jena campaign. After that battle my father's father, with a few other Prussian noblemen, organised a secret league which was to stir up the peasants to resistance, and save our country from being dismembered. The league was betrayed; my father was seized and tried by a French court-martial; and for the crime of being a patriot was condemned to death."

Fleur de Lys's arm trembled, and her breathing grew quicker.

"I should tell you, Mademoiselle, that there was a Frenchman who tried to save my grandfather," continued the Prussian, in a quiet voice. "Our ancestral home was then filled with French officers, and one of them, who had sat on the court-martial and voted for an acquittal, went personally to the Emperor to obtain a pardon. It was refused, and Napoleon, to punish the officer for what he called his temerity, ordered that he should command the platoon who were to perform the execution. Upon this, the officer broke his sword and threw up his commission. He did more, for resignation being unlawful in time of war, he underwent military degradation, and served through the rest of the campaign as a private soldier. This officer was"——

"Your name, Monsieur?" cried Fleur de Lys, laying both hands on his arm.

"I prefer to give you that of our benefactor, Mademoiselle," answered the Prussian. "It was the Marquis de Bressac, your grandfather."

V.

Less than a fortnight after the above scene, a great change had come over the country round Bressac. Surprised and outnumbered by the clever move of a French general, who performed the one brilliant feat of arms (on his side) during the war, the German army occupying O—— had been compelled to retreat, to avoid being taken prisoners *en masse*. Great was the rejoicing at O—— for

three or four days, when it was thought that the cruel tide of defeat was at last going to turn. But at the end of that time people knew that the Germans would not allow their first failure to go unretrieved, and O—— prepared for another battle. Who then so elated as the Duc de Bressac? The French general had informed him that the castle might offer a useful point of resistance in the coming operations, and had sent a thousand men to encamp in the park and erect barricades there by felling down trees and demolishing outhouses. There were few things of which the Duke was prouder than his trees; but it was with a radiant countenance that he limped about amongst the soldiers, encouraging them as they were hewing down the biggest, and pointing out to them that they might greatly strengthen their barricades by taking all the pedestals of the statues that adorned his garden. The soldiers were amazed, and the general could not forbear expressing his admiration.

“If you only knew, Monsieur le Duc, what resistance I have had to encounter in demolishing some other country houses—houses, too, that would have fitted into a single courtyard of this noble place,” added he, glancing, not without regret, at the stately building.

“Our family have enjoyed the possession of this house four centuries, so that we can afford to lose it, *mon Général*,” answered the Duke with a smile; and the same afternoon, as he saw an officer of engineers hesitate before ordering the destruction of an exquisite pavilion that stood in the way of the defence works, he took a pickaxe out of a sapper’s hands and struck the first blow into it himself.

Fleur de Lys, meanwhile, followed the example of her

father. Wherever a woman's voice and presence could nerve the arm or raise the spirit of a French soldier, there was she, calm, beautiful, and with stirring words of hope on her lips. The soldiers, reviving the title that was given to Mademoiselle de Montpensier under the wars of the "Fronde," called her "La Grande Mademoiselle;" and such was the enthusiasm she excited, that the more superstitious amongst the soldiers—those who came from Languedoc or Brittany—would try and touch some portion of her dress with their amulets as she walked amongst them, under the belief that it would charm their lives. But the devotion towards her rose to fever-heat when she declared that she had no intention of leaving the castle when the fighting began, but that she would remain in it to the end, *whatever happened*. Even the prudent M. Jean-Baptiste grew valiant then. To be sure, he reflected that, even if it came to the worst, there would always be the cellar to hide in; and, strengthened by this thought, he gave the reins to his imagination in recounting all that he would do when at length he should have those "gueux de Prussiens" opposite him. "Figure to yourself, Monsieur le Marquis," he cried, with the most feeling gestures, to M. de Criquetot—"figure to yourself that one of those unhung thieves wanted to give me a hundred-franc note when he went away. It was that hobbledoy of a Count Leoneizen. You know that lout who used to go mooning about the garden. Said I to him, 'If I were a few years younger, I would teach you what it is to offer money to a Frenchman, you blue whipping-post, you. Hurry out of my sight!' and I threw the note into his face."

"Taking care to pick it up again as it fell, to put it into

your pocket," continued the Marquis, with a laugh; which speech naturally a little disconcerted M. Jean-Baptiste, whose true reply to the Count had been, "Monsieur le Comte, it is only in Prussia that so much generosity is allied to so much valour. I will keep this note for ever as a souvenir, and wish you not 'Adieu,' but 'Au revoir.'"

But if M. Jean-Baptiste found a sceptical hearer in the Marquis, his tales were listened to with credence enough elsewhere, and the story of how extremely quick the Prussians had vanished from the castle at the news that O—— was going to be attacked, lent not a little impetus to the preparations for defence. The General, however, though he felt how valuable an auxiliary Fleur de Lys would be to him, tried to dissuade her from thus exposing her life: but his eloquence was wasted. "My place is here, General," she said, gravely, once and for all; and from that moment this soldier perceived it would be useless to recur to the matter.

It was only M. de Criquetot who was aware how much heroism it needed on his cousin's part to take this resolution. *He* knew, or, at all events, guessed, that Fleur de Lys's heart would no longer be wholly with the combatants around her, as it would have been some weeks before. She had told him cursorily and vaguely how she had been protected by a Prussian officer on that night when she had returned alone from the village; but though the details were few, his lover's instinct had supplied the rest; and putting this and that together, recalling many a stray symptom and incident the true significance of which had escaped him at the time of its occurrence, but the real meaning of which now stood revealed, he had not long

remained doubtful as to who his rival was. But of course he had not breathed a word of his suspicions to Fleur de Lys. This was a thing too sacred to be hinted at by a third person. Only the young Frenchman, recognising in the Prussian officer a man more great, generous, and worthy of Fleur de Lys than he felt himself to be, had vowed that if he could bring this man and his cousin together, he would do so.

And so time flew by until the day of battle.

It dawned and closed as many other days of battle had done for France during that year. Ill-clad, ill-organised, ill-armed mobs of recruits pitted against science, generalship, and discipline, there could be but one result. By the end of four hours' fighting the French soldiers had been routed. The battle was hopelessly lost, and there was but one point where resistance still continued to be offered—the Castle of Bressac.

It had not been much attacked during the day, for it was rather beyond the range of the field where the heat of the day's combat had raged. But in the afternoon, when the enemy were masters of all the positions which the French had occupied, and it was found that the Castle of Bressac still fired shells furiously from a battery of four guns established in the park, a parliamentarian was despatched to explain how bootless further resistance was, and to demand a surrender.

The answer was a refusal.

The Duke had said to the commanding officer, "Let us not yield, so long as there is a cartridge amongst us, Monsieur;" and as the officer almost looked upon the

Duke as the true commander of the place, he had conveyed this reply to the enemy.

An hour later the battery in the park had been dismounted, a whole wing of the castle had been blown into fragments, and the foremost barricade in the park no longer existed.

Another half-hour, and the second barricade was abandoned.

Then the third had to be relinquished.

Then the fourth.

The soldiers continued to fire bravely and desperately. They could see nothing either before or behind them. The park and grounds were steeped in a fog of smoke, amidst which resounded the groans of wounded men and the bang of shells exploding every moment.

At length the park became thoroughly untenable. The retreat sounded, and the last barricade was deserted.

"We can still defend the castle!" shouted the Duke, who, grimy with powder and blood-stained, had been firing from the barricades side by side with the soldiers.

"To the castle!" cried the commanding officer, obediently echoing, and waving his sword above his head. He was on foot. His horse had been shot under him.

In a very few minutes more the park was filled with Prussians. The artillery duel had now ceased. It could only be a question of defending the castle man to man and hand to hand. The defenders fired out of the windows; the invaders fired back, but also charged forward with bayonets, to try and carry the place by storm.

The carnage was becoming frightful. Eleven assaults were repulsed one after the other. The marble terrace,

bordering on the ground-floor windows, was strewn with great mounds of dead, and blood trickled down the white steps, as if from an open fountain. Every moment a crash could be heard, as a bullet shivered a wainscot or smashed a mirror into a thousand atoms. There was not a pane of glass unbroken in the whole house. Two or three bullets, striking the great crystal chandelier in the state drawing-room together, cut the chains by which it hung, as though with a scythe, and the mighty fabric of glass splintered on to the floor like a shower of diamonds, carrying away crumbling masses of plaster from the ceiling with it. But nobody talked of yielding, until at length the cry arose that ammunition was beginning to fail.

"If we could only knock over that officer who is commanding them!" shouted a bare-armed, bare-throated soldier, who had thrown off his coat to fight better, and was streaming with perspiration, "it might discourage them."

M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys were near him. Fleur de Lys had been loading for the soldiers, her cousin taking care to stand—without her perceiving it—in such a position that a bullet must strike him before hitting her. The soldier had pointed out of the window in uttering his cry. M. de Criquetot and Fleur de Lys both glanced over his shoulder. The officer he was designating was Friedrich Leoneizen.

The man levelled his rifle. He was a deadly marksman; but just as he was drawing the trigger, the Marquis brushed by him with his elbow. The shot missed. Fleur de Lys, who had been holding her breath, and was leaning against a wall for support, looked towards her cousin, and

their eyes met. The man was reloading a second time. He aimed ; but M. de Criquetot was saved the trouble of spoiling the shot again, for, while the finger was on the trigger, the rifle slipped out of the man's hand, and he fell forward himself, with a bullet in the head.

The shout now seemed to rise from everybody at once :
—"The officer !—fire at him !"

"He seems bewitched : the bullets won't touch him."

"This is at his head."

"Bang !"

"Bang !"

But the officer advanced, his men following him. Lead whistled around, above, on all sides, but never harmed him.

"If somebody does not bring him down, he and his men will be in the castle in another minute," thundered an officer, and he discharged three barrels of a revolver in quick succession.

At this moment, the Duke de Bressac, who had been kneeling behind the window-sill to fire the better, sprang up, with his hand to his head, staggered forward, and rolled at his daughter's feet. A revolver escaped from his hands, which Fleur de Lys picked up.

"The officer ! at the officer !" the cry now started from a hundred parched throats at once.

Pale, but with her lips set, Fleur de Lys stepped forward. She hesitated a moment : then she aimed with her weapon. Friedrich Leoneizen was scarcely at thirty yards' distance from her. Her face was flushed, but grave and sad. She pressed the trigger.

He reeled in his saddle, looked, saw who had shot him ; then fell.

Before her cousin could stop her, or guess her intention, Fleur de Lys had sprung on to the window-sill, where she knelt on one knee, her hair streaming, her breast daring the shower of lead. There was the remnant of a tricolour flag trailing over the ledge; she seized it and waved it, crying, "Vive la France! They are falling back!"

The Prussian bugles were sounding the retreat. The French girl heard them as she dropped, and she breathed her last amid the triumphant cheers of her countrymen, shouting "Victory!"

MADemoiselle VIVIANE.

MADemoisELLE VIVIANE:

THE STORY OF A FRENCH MARRIAGE.



I.

THERE was a full gathering of relatives and intimate friends at the house of Monsieur le Président de Barre, Chief Judge of the Imperial Court of M——. The glass chandeliers were lighted, the housings had been removed from the furniture in the yellow drawing-room, and preparations had been afoot two days in the kitchen, in view of the supper. The occasion was indeed an important one. Mademoiselle Viviane de Barre, the Judge's only child and heiress, was to be formally introduced to her future husband, M. de Niel.

All the preliminaries of this solemnity had been conducted after the old and approved method. At ten years of age Mdle. Viviane had been sent to a convent; at seventeen she had been withdrawn thence. At seventeen and a half she was known in the best society of M—— as a young lady who would have five hundred thousand francs for her dower; who was religious, beautiful, and who sang

well. At eighteen, twenty suitors had already solicited of her parents the honour of becoming her husband. At eighteen and a half the Judge and Madame de Barre, being of opinion that it was time some choice should be made, had called their friend and spiritual adviser, M. l'Abbé Béghin, into council, and between the three it had been settled that the most eligible suitor of all was M. Charles de Niel, who had not done his courtship in person, who had in fact never seen Mdlle. Viviane ; but who was the son of M. le Président de Niel, Chief Judge in the neighbouring town of A—, bore a name rendered honourable by a long line of judicial ancestors, possessed three hundred thousand francs of his own, was steady, laborious, and of pious education, held the office of Deputy Public Prosecutor in the town of T—, and would, no doubt, owing to his own merit and to his influential connections, but chiefly the latter, rise in time to the highest post in the magistracy. It was Charles de Niel's own father who had proposed the match to President de Barre, and the match was thought a good one by all who were competent to pronounce an opinion on such a subject.

The only two interested persons who had not been consulted were those whom perhaps the negotiations most concerned ; that is, M. Charles and Mdlle. Viviane themselves. When everything had been arranged, President de Niel had said to his son that it was fitting he should marry, and that on a certain day and at a stated hour he would present him to a young lady who, he was persuaded, would make him a good wife—to which Charles de Niel had answered, "Yes, sir," with the usual submissive respect of

well-bred French sons towards their fathers, and without the smallest indication of a wish or a thought to choose his own wife for himself. On her side, Madame de Barre had said nothing whatever to her daughter, but on the evening of the proposed introduction she had superintended Mdlle. Viviane's dressing in person, had recommended plainness—that is, simple muslin, with a tea-rose in the hair, and a pale-blue sash with long ends round the waist; and when she had satisfied herself that her daughter looked as gracefully modest as it becomes a legal dignitary's wife to be, she had accompanied her to the drawing-room with a mother's invariable conviction that Mdlle. Viviane knew nothing at all of what was going to happen. To those who have any knowledge of ladies, however, it is needless to remark that Mdlle. Viviane was as well acquainted with all the details of the impending comedy, knew the name of her suitor, and was as conversant with the history of his life, means, character, and prospects, as if the particulars had been supplied to her in a printed book, with an appendix of notes at the end. It might be interesting to speculate how it is that young ladies always become familiar with affairs intended to be kept a secret from them; but one had better confine one's self to making mention of the fact without seeking to fathom it.

The date was the month of July 1870, and as M—— was a large city, the number of people who claimed to be the friends of a Chief Judge held in high esteem by all the authorities of the Empire, was considerable. By ten o'clock in the evening all the rooms of President de Barre's by no means small mansion were crowded. Madame de Barre had not taken any one into her confidence; but

everybody guessed what was in the wind, for the mere circumstance of the President's wife giving a large party, with a dance and supper, at a season of the year when such entertainments are not usual (in France), was proof enough that something was preparing; and what more natural than that that something should be the betrothal of Mdlle. Viviane to the gentleman who had been fortunate enough to prevail over all the other suitors? So the friends, as they trooped up the wide staircase of the Judge's richly furnished house, evinced some curiosity to see who the lucky man would be. The rejected candidates were watchful to look how Mdlle. Viviane would bear herself under her prospective change of condition; and the feminine relatives of these rejected candidates—mothers, aunts, and pet sisters—persuaded that no good could come of having ignored the qualities of their respective paragons, hoped sincerely that prosperity might attend the marriage, but were afraid not.

This was especially the sentiment among the most intimate friends of all. These were assembled in an inner drawing-room, where they petted Mdlle. Viviane, smiled to her as she handed them tea, admired her albums of drawings, stroked her cat, and gave her recipes to cure a very bad cold with which her canary was afflicted. The blandishments were adroit and unceasing; but they were probably lavished in an inverse ratio to the real feelings of the donors, for, excepting an honest general and his wife, who, having no children of their own, were free to be indifferent as to what other people did with theirs, there was scarcely an intimate friend in the room but had reason to feel sore at Mdlle. Viviane's rumoured engagement.

Some were sore in their capacity of disappointed relatives ; others simply as amateur matchmakers ; but most felt sore in some way. There was Madame de Corbot, wife of the Public Prosecutor of M——, and an old school-friend of Madame de Barre, who had hoped that Viviane would become her son's wife, and had gone through Heaven knows what amount of family diplomacy to attain this end ; Madame Surpleix, sister to the Bishop, who had looked upon it as a thing preordained of Heaven that her own son was to be the favoured man ; Madame de Diamantelle, wife of one of the departmental members, who had intrigued on behalf of a young cousin of hers whose welfare she had at heart ; M. Poignfermaye, the Prefect, who had manœuvred for himself, and several others whose disappointment now was none the less genuine from being concealed or gauzed over.

When a young lady, having half a million francs for her portion, as much more under form of "expectations," and a powerfully connected family, marries, she casts bitterness and perturbation into a large number of circles. All who had ventured to build castles in the air at her expense feel that they have a right to consider themselves in some way aggrieved, and, whether they have the right or no, they take it. The only real consolation which Mdlle. Viviane's intimate friends could find was, that perhaps her betrothed might turn out unworthy ; that this should be discovered before the contract was signed ; and that, the match being broken off, the lists should be open anew to all comers. This, of course, they hoped, not for their own sakes, but for poor Viviane's, the dear child !

At ten o'clock the lucky suitor, of whom so many minds

were sketching fancy portraits charitably coloured, had not yet arrived ; but there was nothing to wonder at in this, for the town of A—— was distant some two hours by rail from M——, and President de Niel had written to say that he could only leave with his son after the rising of his court in the evening. He purposed doing no more than introduce the young man and then return ; but M. Charles de Niel had obtained a week's leave from the Public Prosecutor of T——, whose deputy he was, and would stay a week, seeing Mdle. de Barre once every day during that time, and proposing to her in form on the seventh day. All this had been arranged beforehand, and Madame de Barre could therefore wait without impatience. She busied herself about her guests, set the dances going in the large rooms, and organised whist-tables in the smaller apartments for such as loved that game. Towards half-past ten, however, when the second quadrille was on, and when the whist had rather thinned the inner sanctum where the intimates had congregated, the major-domo glided softly to the door and announced “ Monsieur le Président de Niel, Monsieur Charles de Niel.”

There was an immediate hush, for though Madame de Barre had kept her counsel wonderfully well for a lady, it darted by instinct through everybody's mind that this must be the chosen man. The father and son entered, looking like duplicate copies of the same picture, etched, the one in grey, the other in black. They were both irreproachably dressed, and the Judge wore round his neck the scarlet collar of the Legion of Honour Commandership. He walked up to Madame de Barre, raised her hand to his lips with the grave courtesy of old times, and, in words slightly

ceremonious but agreeable to hear, because evidently natural to the speaker, begged leave to introduce his son. Then he stood, and seemed to be seeking for Mdlle. Viviane, who was at another end of the room, patiently inserting slides into a stereoscope for an old lady who pretended to see and admire, but could do no such thing. A glance from her mother brought Viviane to where the gentlemen were standing. Her manner was collected, equally free from forwardness and timidity. The Judge paid her a paternal, courtly, and very sincere compliment on her beauty, then added, smiling: "Your parents and I, Mademoiselle, have been fast friends for many years. It would gladden me if our friendship could become hereditary; this is my son Charles de Niel;" and he rather solemnly ushered Charles forward.

She bent her head in response to the young man's deep bow, but said nothing; it was, in fact, not necessary that she should speak yet. The Judge turned to shake hands with President de Barre, who was grey like himself, be-collared like himself, and encased in that same smileless dignity which French judges study to wear until it fits them like a second nature. The two, after a few words of greeting incidental to the presentation of M. Charles to the Judge, soon strolled away with their hands behind their backs, and in amicable converse; and Charles de Niel was left standing alone by the two ladies. During a quarter of a minute—but one of those quarters of a minute that constitute an age for the intensity of the emotions they comprise, and for the ulterior consequences they store up—he could not take his eyes off Viviane, though he tried.

She was, in all truth, a splendid creature, of a beauty

lustrous and warm as the sunny climate of Provence, where she was born, and with eyes so teeming with expression that they seemed to shed light like precious stones. Her complexion was not white, but of that creamy shade called *bistre*, which passion can deepen to a ruddy glow ; and the colour of her lips was a rich moist crimson, which, had she been an actress, would have made her despise the most scarlet rouge as too pink. The folds and waves of her hair clustered so abundantly that when let down they must have fallen to below her waist—silky, raven hair it was, and full of life and suppleness like all else about her. Judging merely by her age, it might have been said that she was too maturely developed, for she looked rather like a young woman than a girl ; but all her movements were young, virgin-like, strong, and fascinating. No wonder that a man should find it difficult to take his eyes off her, and feel his heart throb at the thought that she was to be his ; for hers was the grace and beauty of innate queenship, and Charles de Niel in particular was one of those men on whom such beauty produces the most sudden and subjugating effects. Tall, thin, and pale, with the pallor of overwork, he had not the face or expression of genius, but looked simply a studious, scholarly young man, who has entered his profession with the hope of rising in it, and sets his ambition for the present on discharging his duties conscientiously. His hair was short, lank, and parted at the side ; he was shaved, all but a little sparse whisker laboriously cultivated ; he carried himself confidently, though with a little stiffness ; and there was an air of rather starched dignity on his features, which came from his trying to give himself a look of magisterial gravity not

quite suited to his years. When he took his eyes off Viviane, however, there was no longer the same expression on his countenance which had been there before. It was the difference between the block of marble when it leaves the statuary's hands, with lineaments hardly sketched, and the same block when it has received the artist's final touch. Charles de Niel, in a few instants, had had life breathed into him.

After the commonplaces which are inevitable on such occasions, and which served to convince excellent Madame de Barre (who resembled her daughter but distantly, as a withered rose resembles a live one) that her future son-in-law was all that M. l'Abbé Béghin, his old tutor, had described, Charles de Niel asked Viviane if she danced. Her mother motioned to her to say yes, but even before she could have caught the sign, she had given that answer of her own accord; and then Charles first heard her voice—a voice singularly musical, yet not shy—it was indeed a little firm, he could not help thinking. It is not quite consonant with etiquette for a Public Prosecutor's deputy to dance, but this was a sort of private party; and then the sweet, dreamy *Valse de Roses*, which was being played, had acted as a stimulant on him, so that for the first time in his life he would have defied any etiquette on the globe's surface as he led out Viviane among the throng of guests who parted to make a way for them. He encircled her with his arm, and the perfume of her hair, the touch of her hand, the balmy breath of her lips, which came and went faster with the rapidity of the whirl, completed the intoxication which the mere sight of her had begun. When the music ceased, he fancied he had not been waltzing

more than a couple of seconds, and cast an impatient glance at the musicians' corner, as if these men were not toiling enough for their money. However, this being a dance and not a ball, it happened very fortunately for him that at the moment when the musicians stopped supper was announced. He had then the right to escort Viviane into the supper-room if she pleased. She did not refuse ; on the contrary, it filled him with delight to see that she accepted his escort willingly, and that she even seemed desirous of drawing him into conversation.

The rejected suitors, intimate friends, and others who had fixed glances of more or less benevolence on the young couple whilst they were dancing, did not lose sight of them amid the knife-and-fork fray of supper, and more than one pair of eyes, after guiding their owners to where the creature comforts were set out, resumed their functions of vigilance, loth to surrender the sweet hope that Mlle. Viviane's accepted lover might prove less satisfactory to herself and her parents in the end than had been originally contemplated. But the young magistrate, who was unaware that anybody had an interest in surveying, much less in criticising, his movements, conducted Viviane to a part of the room where he thought she would be most comfortable, and began catering for her with an assiduity which surprised himself from its energy and readiness. The supper was laid out on the sensible plan of little tables for parties of two, four, or six. He monopolised one of the smallest, and brought to it all he could find that was good, not excepting a bottle of champagne, which he set on the table in its silvered pail of ice, and from which he filled Viviane's glass and his own, wondering of what all

this junketing could remind him—though, poor fellow! it reminded him of nothing, for being a bookworm by habit and vocation, he had never taken part in anything like it before. It is certain that, if some of the thieves, inebriates, and others against whom the Deputy Prosecutor had been inveighing in court with all a neophyte's austerity but a few hours before, had beheld him sitting there with such keen enjoyment of the new happiness that had invaded his life, they would have marvelled at his brazenness in telling them that unremitting labour was the sole secret of contentment. His contentment, indeed, beamed from all his features, and lent them the animation which is the livery of happiness. He smiled, forgot that he was a censor of the sins of men, discarded the measured tones to which he had schooled his voice, and when he had helped Viviane to some of the dainties he had collected, dipped his lips in wine, and summoned up all the resources of his fresh-stirred spirits, his new-born hopes, and his wit—for most men are witty in such moments—to dazzle and please the girl.

But just as he was looking up to make some glad, merry remark about the gaiety of the scene around them—for the music in the next room had begun again, and the ebb and flow of bright dresses, the jingling of plate, and the popping of corks seemed all to be going on to tune—an unlooked-for thing occurred to him: he caught her eyes fastened on him with a deep expression of curious scrutiny. It was a very odd glance. Somehow he had had a vague feeling that she had looked at him in this way more than once before—whilst they were dancing, whilst he was running about to set the things on their

table, and again whilst he was talking; but he had dismissed the idea, thinking it must be an illusion. Now, however, there was no illusion. Though she lowered her glance at once on being detected, he had not missed the singular expression of it—a blending of irresolution, pity, and something like menace—one of those glances which he himself occasionally rested on a prisoner when doubtful whether he had some redeeming point which might plead in his favour, or whether he might be sacrificed without remorse. This was the kind of glance, and it nipped the remark he was going to make short on his lips. There was a moment's silence, during which he reflected that she had only answered him as yet in monosyllables, and that, although she had seemed eager enough for his company, her few smiles to him had all been forced. Then, being at a loss to understand why this should be, he recurred to his first belief that he must be mistaken—that it was the gas or something that had deceived him. He looked up again, saw that she was smiling a graceful friendly smile to a girl acquaintance at a neighbouring table, and, confirmed by this in his mistrust of his own eyesight, he said, lightly, "What tricks our fancy can play us! Do you know, I was thinking a moment ago that you looked at me like a judge," and he laughed.

"Like a judge!" she echoed; and again the gas, or whatever it was, must have played him false, for he thought she darted at him a glance rapid and piercing as steel.

"You are not eating," he remarked, observing this with some concern.

"Thank you," she answered. "I am not quite used to late suppers; but I will take an ice."

He gave her an ice, and she ate or pretended to eat, though it looked as if her doing so were mainly to oblige him. Soon she said, in her soft, clear, and grave voice: "You were saying, 'like a judge.' Have judges, then, a look different to other people's?" and she laughed, too, but a constrained laugh.

"On occasions," he replied, glad to be questioned by her.

"What occasions, for instance?" she inquired, toying with her spoon.

"I mean there are times when a judge feels doubt as to the extent of an accused man's guilt. He tries then to probe deeper than the man's countenance, into his heart."

"And what is a judge's notion of a guiltless heart?" she asked, with fixed attention.

Men generally like to be interrogated on professional matters. If Charles de Niel had been a paradoxist, he would have answered that people are all bad alike; that the only difference is, that some are brought to book for their sins, whilst others remain unsuspected; and that, by striking an accused man with all one's might, without pausing to weigh the blow, one may be sure of having punished a culprit, whether the man be guilty of the particular offence ascribed to him or not. But the young Deputy Prosecutor was not addicted to social theories, and he replied with the seriousness of one whose maxims as to guilt are quite plain and traditional: "Men who have led an honest and laborious life for a certain number of years may be drawn into crime by the pressure of want, anger, or ignorance; and I would deal leniently with these if they show themselves ashamed of their guilt, that is, do not set

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up an excuse for their offences. The worst kind of culprits are those who try to throw the responsibility of their crimes on society. I have had to do with prisoners of this sort, and I have always been merciless to them, notwithstanding that some were men who had performed courageous and disinterested actions at times, and were capable of doing so again."

"And yet," remarked she, with something like a flash in her eyes, "a courageous or disinterested act must come from a heart intrinsically nobler than that of a man who has never done anything but live ploddingly in selfishness."

"No," said he, speaking this time with the precision of a man who is arguing a point with one of his own cloth; "you may trace an act of courage or generosity to vanity, which is only abstract selfishness, or to a passing impulse bred of animal pity, love, or excitement: you cannot trace years of plodding, that is, honest, hard-working life, to anything but a clear, sound mind. And a clear mind argues a well-ordered heart. If a man have so conquered his passions as to become a machine working regularly, uncomplainingly, patiently, from a sense of duty, I take it he is a more worthy character, even though he has yielded to temptation once, than the brilliant law-breaker who would often find it difficult to explain why he did this or that good deed, but has a whole fagot of theories ready cut and dried to explain how he became a criminal."

"Then dead-level is your ideal?" she asked, in a voice which was searching rather than contemptuous.

"Yes," he answered very decidedly. He had not touched any of the delicacies with which he had piled

the table, but was tracing triangles on his plate with his knife's point. He seemed absorbed. "Ah, *Made-moiselle*," he added, with a short sigh, "there is more warmth in some of those dead-level characters than you appear to think: a plain is not flowerless from being flat, nor a pool shallow because its surface is unruffled. Let me give you a case with which I had to deal professionally not two months ago. There was a workman at T—who led a plodding life in every sense of that term. He worked hard from morning to night, and was not much liked by other workmen, for he was never seen to spend a sou on anybody but himself, and would never join his companions in any of their drinking-bouts. They said, too, that he was sulky. Well, his object was to save money enough to marry a factory-girl. One day he learned that a brother workman of his, who was much handsomer, more intelligent, gayer, and more open-handed than himself, was courting this same girl. She had plighted her troth to him, the plodding workman, and his rival knew it, but it was part of his gaiety to think that if he could win the girl away from his comrade it would be fair sport. The plodder waited for him one night at a street corner and split his head open with a wood-cleaver. I am not defending the man, for I delivered the speech which sent him to the scaffold; but I could not help thinking, on reading of his execution, that perhaps the real culprit was the man who had been murdered, or (his voice deepened a little)—the girl."

Viviane turned very pale. She cast another rapid and hesitating glance at Charles de Niel over her fan which she was fluttering; and for a moment a battle

appeared to rage within her. Then she rose and said quickly : " Monsieur de Niel, I must speak to you at once in private. The library beyond the conservatory there is empty. We shall be alone in it."

He rose too, feeling a surprise which it would be useless trying to depict. He gave her his arm, and worked her a passage through the supper throng. One must have heard a well-bred Frenchman's estimate of what is becoming in a young girl, to understand the stupefaction, amounting to dismay, of the young official, as he followed Viviane, rather than led her, through the ball-room and conservatory. Her curious interrogatories at supper he had not so much noticed ; but now, taking these in connection with the strange glances she had cast him, and with her entirely unexpected request, it quite staggered his at no time very imaginative mind. They were not long reaching the library, and when there, she came at once to what she had to say, not losing a moment. Standing on the hearthrug and fronting him, with her face flushed, her bosom heaving, and her eyes fixed on his with emotion and excitement, " Monsieur de Niel," she began, " I believe you have come with the intention of offering me your hand."

" Yes," he stammered, feeling his heart shrink, as if from fear of a blow.

" Well, let me tell you frankly,"—she made a gesture of entreaty with her hand at seeing his features blanch,—“ let me tell you that I can never be your wife. Oh, I will explain everything to you without reserve,” added she, speaking quicker, but sinking into a chair. “ I will speak to you as if you were my confessor. I can trust in your

honour, I feel ; but even if my secret were disclosed, it could have no effect on my determination." She paused an instant. "This is what I have to say : I was brought up at a convent ; every word I heard there was meant to teach me that honesty should be the rule of life. I was told to worship truth, to respect people, not according to their wealth but their goodness, to believe that there are eternal punishments in store for those who act or utter lies. When I was home for the holidays they took me to church ; I went to confession ; my mother, who is pious in the estimation of the world, gave me the lives of the saints to read, impressed upon me that I must take pattern by them, and that there is no happiness possible without religion. All this lasted so long as I was a child, and I may say that the nun who chiefly taught me at the convent was a model herself of all the virtues she enjoined. Heaven must be peopled with such women if there is a heaven ; God knows how much I loved and admired her, and how I vowed to take her for an example when I should go out into the world ! I was seventeen when I left the convent. To tell you of my illusions, of my belief in the goodness of all the persons with whom I was brought into contact, is more than I dare do, for I pity myself when I think of it. I will only say that the trust I put in my parents was something beyond the strength of sentiments one can define. It was holy, intense, a thing of every day and hour. I was convinced that no thought that was not pure, beautiful, and good could cross my mother's mind ; my father was in my eyes the noblest and most virtuous of men. Do you know, M. de Niel, I have sometimes asked myself which is the acutest of all known griefs, and I think it is that of finding

one's confidence shaken in those we have loved—as I loved my father and mother?”

She smiled with painful bitterness as she said this, and glanced up at him to watch the effect of her words on Charles de Niel. He was leaning against the mantelshelf, and gazing at her with almost haggard apprehension.

“It is not necessary to go through the story of how my illusions were reft from me one by one,” resumed she, speaking with moody vehemence: “I entered the world as if I had been a young girl in a silk gown going through a bramble-bush. All my faith in the goodness, truth, and disinterestedness of people was rudely torn from me in shreds. My father I found to have but one idol—respectability; and respectability with him meant money. His judicial office, the highest and saintliest which a man can exercise, he looked upon as a means of procuring him the decoration of the Legion of Honour. He was continually anxious as to whether such and such a judgment of his would satisfy the Ministry, and I have seen him in the deepest consternation because he had to adjudicate between two merchants of M——, both equally rich and influential: he feared that whichever way he decided, he should have one of these merchants for his enemy. As to my mother—well, my mother was chiefly concerned about getting me married; and in her solicitude for what is termed a *suitable* match, she conned over all the names of the single men in the province, but without ever, so far as I could see, weighing any other qualities in them than their money, birth, and connections. I was nearly allotted to a man who had made millions by a swindling joint-stock company; and if this suitor was rejected, it was not because

of his swindle, but because it was doubtful whether there was not an article in the Code by which the swindled people might prosecute the man and get their money back. Another of my wooers was considered a rising man. He had altered his political convictions several times, and had climbed a step higher in the world by each of his apostasies. I was saved the honour of becoming his intended bride by the mere circumstance of his lighting upon a lady who had a couple of hundred thousand francs more dowry than I, and hence was naturally preferable. Then came yourself, M. de Niel" (here her voice, from common politeness, lost some of its asperity), "and I will not disguise from you that your being a man of honour had very little to do with our being introduced to each other this evening. Our marriage was mapped out beforehand in all its minute details. You were to bring so much, I so much. Your birth was irreproachable, because your fathers had been judges before you, and this was thought an element worth considering ; but it was deemed a pity you should only be able to show 300,000 francs as your part of the wedding-contract, and an appeal was to be made to your parents to add another 200,000 francs, if possible. If I died within two years of our marriage, your integrity was held in so high esteem that you were to be compelled by deed to restore my half-million to our family ; just as if you would not have done so without the deed ! You were also to be tied down—I believe they call it tying down—about certain contingencies, such as the impulse to dispose of my capital without letting me know, or the wish to alienate too much of your own. In fact, anybody reading the contract which was to be the charter of our wedded life might

have thought that you were a notoriously dishonest person, against whose enterprises it was considered urgent to shield me; and this flattering estimate of your character seemed also to have been extended to your mental capacities, for instead of computing what way you might be able to make in your profession by your own unaided talents, it was repeatedly dwelt upon that by the influence of your relatives you might be able to outstrip some of your colleagues less luckily connected. Even your political opinions were made the subject of speculation; for it was decided that you were to cultivate as many political acquaintances as feasible in the department, in order that when the Government had been coaxed into promoting you faster than your merit warranted, you might compel them to go on promoting you faster still, by the threat that if you did not obtain all you asked for, you would get yourself elected to the Chamber as an independent representative. So you see nothing was omitted in calculating the items that were to make our marriage dignified, and promote in me a feeling of esteem and admiration for you."

Her voice had grown quick and sarcastic again in pronouncing the last sentences. Charles de Niel, who had flushed red at the unpitying frankness of her words, tried once or twice to speak, and at last said, coughing to suppress his hoarseness: "You attribute to these marriage-contracts a meaning they do not possess. I should not have regarded it as a slight upon myself if your fortune had been protected. Marriage is a union of interests as well as of affections, you know, and"—

"Marriage should be a union of sympathies,—it should

be love," she interrupted, her whole frame vibrating, and her hands tearing abruptly at her handkerchief. "The woman should give herself and her fortunes to her husband wholly; she should go with him to his house to be his helpmate, his partner, his slave. There should be no contract to bind their actions but his will, and her love freely, unreservedly, and trustingly bestowed. That is how I understand marriage; and any other union save on these conditions is a bargain as mercenary and immoral as those at which society veils its eyes, because the Church has not sanctioned them. Monsieur de Niel, long before it had been decided, without my approval, that I should be your wife, I had resolved that I should be the wife of but one man,—the man whom I could love and worship, poor or rich, in happiness or in sorrow, and who could love me without knowing who I was or what I possessed. And that man I have found!"

The pallor of Charles de Niel's face deepened slightly as he gazed at her there before him, so beautiful in the splendid vigour of her love. He sighed inaudibly, and then said slowly, as if in physical pain: "I know that I am not an ideal hero. At first sight of you I felt how much I should have to do to deserve my happiness."

She seemed a little touched by this simple rejoinder, and it was with some softness that she replied: "I do not say that I could not have liked you, M. de Niel, had we met under different circumstances to those of to-night; but it was fated otherwise. My choice has been made for more than a year past. The man I love is not rich. You might say that he is not my equal in social rank; but I will marry

him, and no one else, if not with my parents' consent, then without it. In two years and a half I shall be of age, and he will wait for me that time. He says he would wait for me for twenty years ; and I believe him, for there is truth in all his looks and words. Then my life belongs to him of right, for I may say that he saved it. Yes," added she, and her voice grew extraordinarily sweet and pensive in speaking of her lover, "I told you I would confess myself in full, and I acknowledge that on discovering that my parents regarded me as a bale of merchandise to be sold to the highest bidder, I felt so great a loathing for life that I wished to leave it. Death seemed a merciful relief beside the prospect of being all my days chained to a man I could not love ; and if I had not met this man—this man who will be my husband—I should have been dead now." She rose and gravely approached Charles de Niel, this time a blush mantling on her face. "It remains for me now," she murmured, "to give you the end of my confession. I had not intended at first to breathe a word of my secret to anybody. I had thought of letting you pay your addresses to me in the usual way, and I should have made you believe that I purposed marrying you ; then, as soon as I was of age—for I should have induced you by one excuse after another to postpone our marriage till that time—I should have told the truth. Your conversation and your manner this evening disarmed me, or, rather"—she hesitated a moment, and suddenly her feverish animation of voice and gesture returned to her—"No, let me be entirely frank. What changed my resolution was not regard for yourself, M. de Niel. It was this : a superstitious terror seized me, that if I trifled with you, if I let you fall in love with me

and then broke your life, it would bring me misfortune. I have seen this happen ; for there is a curse on deceit in all its forms. Whilst you were speaking, I fancied I saw that you would challenge the man I had preferred to you, and kill him ; or, worse than that, I had a presentiment that from the moment I began to encourage in you a love which I had no intention of requiting, I myself should cease to be loved by the man whose love is life to me. Now I have told you all."

She seemed to expect an answer from him, but her eyes were not downcast, and there was nothing in her manner to show that she deemed her confession a thing to be ashamed of. Charles de Niel could only look at her in seeming fascination. Perhaps he would have liked to speak, but he appeared to be following a train of thought which left him only power to feel the intense humiliation of his position without finding a word to alleviate it. She waited a moment, mechanically opening and shutting the white fan in her hands ; then she said slowly : " I have not asked you to keep my secret with regard to my parents or yours ; I should not be justified in doing so. But I must tell you candidly what I have resolved. The day my father and mother learn what you now know, I shall leave their house. My love is not one for which I have any reason to blush, but I would not submit to the two years and a half of reproaches, persecutions, and petty miseries which it is in the power of parents to inflict on their children. My parents wished to sell me as completely as any slave was ever sold ; I have rebelled. If I am to be persecuted for doing that which I have a right to do, like the poorest of God's creatures—that is, bestow my affection

where I please—I shall fly for protection to the man who will shield me. I shall not be his wife in the eyes of your law, but I shall in the sight of Heaven.”

Charles de Niel winced, and made a gesture of dissuasion. The sanctity of parental authority and the horror of all family scandals are sentiments so deeply rooted in the minds of Frenchmen of ancient houses that the young Procureur for a moment forgot his own sorrow to think only of what a frightful disgrace it would be if M^dle. Viviane de Barre eloped from her father's roof. “This must not be thought of, Mademoiselle,” he said, quickly. “If your affections are irrevocably bestowed, and if”—(the words seemed to cost him an effort)—“if the object of them be as worthy as I make no doubt he is, your parents can certainly be prevailed upon to give their consent to your marriage. You would never forgive yourself if you brought down dishonour upon the great name your ancestors have left you.”

“My affianced husband is a man of honour, spotless as snow,” she answered unquaveringly ; “but you little know my parents if you fancy they could ever be softened or argued into giving their consent to what they would call a *mésalliance*. Oh, if my love were ever so mean of soul and weak of intellect, but rich only and of good connections, then it would be no *mésalliance* ; but he is poor, a man of genius, who works for his bread with his hands and his brains, and will owe the fame he will one day earn to no one but himself. This is a *mésalliance*, a thing banned by all our family traditions and the customs of society, and sooner than sanction it I believe my parents would see me in my coffin.”

"You must not say that," he interposed with a moan.

"It is true," she rejoined simply, and playing again with her fan; "but you must not suppose I am insensible to the dishonour of a scandal. If I saw a way of avoiding it without submitting to what I consider to be even more debasing than the worst of scandals, then I should not speak as I have done; but I can imagine no way unless my secret be kept from my parents till I come of age. Then, as they would be powerless to prevent my marriage, perhaps they will pretend to sanction it, sooner than have it said that I defied them. To bring all this about, however," added she, resignedly, "it would need that we both—I mean you and I—should seem to agree to the match which our families have planned for us; and this is more than I have a right to ask of you, or than you could consent to grant even if I did ask it."

Their conversation had lasted about twenty minutes, and had been uninterrupted by the intrusion of any strangers into the library. The sounds of the music from the distant ball-room reached them by snatches and muffled. They were quite alone, and they seemed more solitary still, and the quietness of the room where they were seemed deeper and more solemn than before, as Charles de Niel replied, after a moment's oppressive silence: "I will not tell you what my grief has been this evening, Mademoiselle, for I think I do not yet foresee myself how ineffaceable a mark this last half-hour's events will leave upon my life. But I will serve you with what devotion lies within my strength; and, since I can claim no other title, let me at least be your friend. I will consent to whatever plan you may suggest to preserve your secret. Let our families suppose,

if you wish it, that we are agreed, and shall by and by be married to each other. It will be the first deceit I shall have wilfully practised on people I love and respect ; but the end in view is a good one, since it involves your welfare, and this will justify me. All I ask of you is this : There will inevitably come a time when your generous nature will cancel the judgment you have formed respecting your parents, and when the concealment of any of your thoughts from them will seem irksome to you. At such a moment you may need a friend who can plead your cause with them, not better, but more dispassionately, than yourself. Call me then, and let me be your advocate and —my rival's. It is my profession to plead" (he smiled faintly), "and I do not pass for eloquent ; but I feel I shall be eloquent in pleading any cause which has for its stake your happiness."

He caught up his hat, which he had laid upon the chimney-piece, bowed, and left her. A minute afterwards she was still standing motionless, looking at the door through which he had disappeared. There were tears in her eyes.

"I am glad I told him the truth," she murmured ; "but if I had not, he would have been a generous enemy."

II.

Charles de Niel left President de Barre's house so overcome that some of the rejected suitors who met him on the staircase were fain to hope that something was amiss. And something was amiss. It is part of that universal creed which is making its way more and more in this

pleasant age of ours that no man is, on the whole, much better than another; and yet it may be doubted whether, taken all in all, Charles de Niel was not as fair a specimen of the "perfect" man as any to be found. He was dull, but so are most perfect men. He had no startling flashes of thought, no ethereal impulses towards an unseizable something, no vague desire to devote himself to a scheme for improving the human race; but he was good in his mechanical geniusless way, and wholly good. The impulse that came naturally uppermost to his mind in all the circumstances of life was an honest one. He slaved at his profession, never asking himself whether he liked it or disliked it, but viewing it as a thing to be followed and adhered to, because he had been bred to it, from no choice of his own. He gave himself a great deal of trouble to guess whether the prisoners whom he was called upon to prosecute were guilty or not. If guilty, he set himself to get them sentenced to the severest penalties which the law inflicted, because, in doing so, he fancied he was discharging his duty towards society, and society was the highest embodiment of worshipfulness which his intellect could grasp. He was twenty-seven, and had led a quite joyless, sorrowless, uneventful life. His father was stern, honourable, and cold; his mother was cold, and he was cold by inheritance. When they had told him he must marry, he had expected nothing more of this ordeal than a cold wife, who should govern his house with honourable blamelessness; bear him, if Heaven pleased, two cold children, who should look upon him and her as patterns of the virtues and the proprieties, and add so much in money and family influence to his social status. He had read books in which great pas-

sions were described, but he thought them stupid reading. He had also been troubled with a friend who was deeply in love; and after lecturing this man, he had dropped him, feeling not quite sure whether it was honest to love in this way, neglect one's duties, and be impervious to argument. Charles de Niel would have walked a mile to satisfy a moderate whim of his own; he would have gone two to oblige a reasonable friend; he would not have walked three to please Heaven itself, unless the practical utility of the journey had been most irrefutably demonstrated to him.

And this was the man into whose life a ravaging, inextinguishable passion had fallen unawares like a firebrand.

He could not at first realise it. When he found himself in the street, he stopped for a minute under a gas-lamp and leaned against it, to try and collect his thoughts. He asked himself whether he had not been dreaming—whether he was sober? Certainly, if it had been prophesied to him that morning that he should, in the course of two hours, see a woman to whom he would, in the brief glance of an instant, give his whole heart and spirit; that this woman would confide to him that she could never be his wife because she loved a man of whom her parents disapproved; and that he, a public censor, and a private moralist to boot, would enter of his own free will into a conspiracy for keeping this woman's illicit attachment a secret from her parents, and for by and by inducing the parents to give their sanction to the attachment—certainly, if this had been foretold him, he would have stared with incredulity at the prophet. The thing was, indeed, out of the range of possible provision. Was he not Charles de Niel,

a man descended from the De Niels, who had been judges, and wealthy, and bowed down to in all time; and could he not have taken any girl he had ever seen before to wife, for the simple condescension of asking? Had he not, in fact, been systematically circumspect in his relations with the sex because of this very fact, that he felt himself to be a prize for which many were angling; and had he not repeatedly theorised within his own intellect as to the imprudence, the immorality even, of marriages that were not based solely on the adjustment of two equal names, two equal fortunes, and two equal collections of interests to one another? Oh yes, all this was the case, and yet there were the facts in opposition to them; and what made the situation more perplexing and wildly hopeless was that, notwithstanding her rejection of him, notwithstanding her horrible—for, to his notions, it had been simply horrible—confession of filial insubordination and outrageously misplaced affections, notwithstanding that no shade of probability existed of her ever feeling anything for him but the most complete indifference, he loved Viviane with a force and a fervour that had spread into all his being like a poison.

He recalled every incident of their interview that evening. There are inflections of voice, gestures, glances which one cannot describe on paper or in words, but which recur to one like the bars of a striking air once heard. He remembered that Viviane had stood near the mantelshelf and gazed at him during a moment as if wondering whether she could trust him; then she had made a quick little wave of the hand, and her lips had relaxed, which meant that she thought she could. Her voice had much less

of the Provençal accent than his, and her demeanour was calmer than that of most Southern women, but by moments the warm blood of her native province had asserted itself in petulant gestures, and in a few words spoken with the rapid querying intonation which the peasant-women of the country possessed. Her attitude had been alternately that of a wounded fawn, turning to ask with her eyes why she was being pursued, and that of a young panthress untamed and defiant. What was the impression which he had definitely carried away from the interview—was it pity, wonder, admiration? This he knew not. The perfume she breathed still lingered with him, her muslin dress still seemed to touch his fingers as when he danced with her, he could see her eyes, lips, complexion, her wavy hair, her royal grace of figure before him as if he had not left her presence. And all these recollections were blended into the sensation which he knew to be love—a love that would never leave him, which must be the delight and torment of his existence, which would be entwined with all his thoughts; and which, if not rewarded, must eventually drive him to the melancholy which brings death, or to that thirst for forgetfulness in which a man throws off his first nature as a garment and plunges into new modes of thinking, being, and acting, as into the sea.

He left his lamp-post and walked straight ahead of him through the streets. As the cafés did not close till one in M——, there were many of them open on his way, and their bright lights, the jingling of glasses, and the rattling of dominoes on their marble tables, were almost a relief to him. There is always at least one thoroughfare in large

provincial cities which is gayer than the gayest of Parisian Boulevards. The whole life of the place is centralised there—the officers of the garrison, the local quidnuncs, the prettiest of the factory-girls after their work, pass and re-pass it, and the thronging and animation of the scene are kept up until long past the time when sensible people are, or should be, in bed. Charles de Niel could not have slept that night, and he dreaded being quite alone with his own thoughts, for they were too new and full of recent pangs. He fancied he should like to walk about on that gay thoroughfare where he was till daybreak ; in moments when he might be tempted to doubt again whether he had been dreaming all that evening, the noise around would prove to him that he was still awake and among the living. Lover-like, however, he had no sooner made up his mind on this point, than he struck across the road and dived down a narrow street, in search of solitude.

He had abruptly lit upon the question : Who could this mysterious lover of Viviane's be ? She had said he was a man of genius who worked with his hands and brains, and would attain fame. This must mean an artist, painter, sculptor, or perhaps even a poet or journalist. He knew what a journalist was. He had had several of them sent to prison, he was glad to think—men who discussed highly and mightily things about which they knew nothing, egged on the public to chronic discontent, and called themselves the moulders of the nation's mind. Poets were not much better, but more conceited. As for artists, all the artists he had ever met, owed money, and were for reforming the social system. Perhaps there were reasonable artists and fair-minded journalists. It must be so, for she had called

her lover a man of stainless honour and truthful mind ; but he was so little acquainted with this circle of society, that he could think of nobody, working with his brains and hands, who could answer to Viviane's enthusiastic description, and be worthy of her. M—— was a seaport town. Diving down the narrow street, Charles de Niel had come within sight of the sea, which was lit up to silvery blueness by a crescent moon. He made for the beach, and there, facing the waves and leaning against a fishing smack drawn up on the shingle, he tried to conjure up out of the waters, as they broke at his feet, the face of his rival. He softened and grew just as the minutes flew by over this lonely occupation, which was not without a certain sad fascination for him. By degrees he came to invest his rival with all the qualities which he instinctively felt that he himself lacked. His admiring recollection of Viviane must have had something to do with the humility with which, for the first time in his life, he endeavoured to take stock of his own deficiencies. He felt that Viviane could only have bestowed her love upon a man who, however low his present station, must have been intended by nature for a prince among men, and he ended with a sigh by picturing to himself this man as the incarnation of all physical and moral perfection—a very hero of romance.

He was roused from his reverie by hearing a gladsome voice carolling on the beach not far from him. He must have been standing where he was a long time, for the noise in the city behind him had subsided, many lights had been put out, and there was no sound on the beach beside the sea, but this one voice which was drawing nearer to him. It was a young man's voice, and it trolled out its

song with a gaiety quickened by wine and the brightness of the night :

“ On entend au loin la chanson des merles :
O ménétrier, prends ton violon ;
Les gais rossignols égrèment des perles :
Quel beau soir ! Dansez, filles d'Avallon ! ”

From where he was he could see the singer approach. He wore a blouse like ordinary workmen, and a *béret*—the flat cap, either scarlet or blue, indigenous to Provence. When within a few yards of the smack he slackened his pace to twirl himself a cigarette, then stopped altogether to fumble for a match—not successfully as it seemed, for he swore one of those light oaths which are the small coin of French expletives. It was at this moment that he caught sight of Charles de Niel, who had stepped out of the shadow of the boat on purpose not to startle him as he passed. He did not seem reassured by the sight, and looked even somewhat disconcerted ; but he pushed his courage to the front, and shouted out a civil request for a light, maintaining, however, a prudent distance.

Charles de Niel, not being a smoker, answered that he had no matches. At the sound of his voice, the young man in the blouse made a few steps hastily forward, stared him in the face, then laughed, and held out both hands.

“ This is an unexpected meeting, Charley (*Charlot*) ! How do you do ? and why are you here at this time of night, frightening the public ? ”

Charles de Niel did not give his hand. He stood astonished, and scrutinised his interlocutor.

“ I do not remember you,” he said.

"No doubt," replied the other, with a merriness that had a dash of acid in it. "Top branches often forget the lower ones. You have risen, whilst I have done just the other thing, which is enough to account for your shortness of memory; but never mind, the race is not over yet, and I may still distance you, so we may as well shake hands."

"I recollect you now," said the young Procureur, shaking his hand, not gushingly, but with some interest. "You are Marjolain, Sixte Marjolain, my old school-fellow."

"And you never missed the chance of prophesying how very badly I should end, which was kind of you! Sixte means, by the way, that I am sixth of a family who have unanimously (since I saw you last) resolved never to give me another stiver, alleging that I am a good-for-nothing, who spent all my own share of the family money—money in our family being apparently not made for spending. Praise be to *νεφέλησπέρα Ζεύς*, patron of cloud-blowers; here is half a lucifer-match in my pocket, and luckily the good half! May I offer you a cigarette?—No? You always kept from bad habits, and I hope you have found life more pleasant from it. I should not have done so. All I complain of is, that there are not bad habits enough. I would willingly acquire a few more: they are the best things in life. But, as I was saying, Heaven ordained you for a prophet. You foretold that I should spend every sou I had, which I did scrupulously; you foresaw, further, that I should have to work for my bread, which I am also doing, as you see."

"You seem to be the same unconcerned fellow as you used to be when we were at school, and later when we

were students together," answered Charles de Niel, not unkindly but seriously. "I hope the world has not dealt as hardly by you as it generally does with those who begin as you did."

"Well, as to that," replied Marjolain, blowing three superb puffs of smoke from his nostrils seaward, "as to that, my father was a hosier, who thought to make a barrister of me, and I have become an engraver instead. The moral is that inordinate ambition never prospers. It is I who engrave those pictures you see in the illustrated papers, also prints for hanging on the walls. I earn more than I absolutely require, and I spend all I earn : miserly habits being the root of all evil. Of a Sunday I might wear a black coat if I pleased ; but I prefer a blouse : comfort being the first law of religion. Perhaps you pity me for ranking as a mechanic ; you are wrong. As a hosier's son, I cut no very grand figure among the set which you adorn ; as an educated engraver among unlearned engravers I am somebody. We have a political club, of which your police know nothing, as usual. I speak there, and am listened to. I always speak clap-trap ; but that makes no difference. Clap-trap is what a two-handed sword and biceps enough to ply it were in the Middle Ages : you make your way with it. You are an example of what legal clap-trap can do ; I shall climb the pole by means of socialistico-communistical clap-trap. When you are Public Prosecutor-General I may be a representative of the people or a Minister ; perhaps I shall reach my goal before you ; if so, I will invite you to dinner."

"I might have foreseen that too, Sixte," remarked the young Procureur, but this time very severely, for a revolu-

tionary radical stood little higher in his esteem than a malefactor. "You first fritter away your substance, then, finding labour tiresome, wish to rise by disturbing society. There are many like you."

"Yes, there are," nodded Marjolain, quite coolly ; "and look you, Charley, the best of rising by disturbing society, as you call it, is, that it costs no trouble and offers all the excitement of gambling into the bargain. I could never have believed that the people were such a concrete mass of imbecility as I find them to be. They will believe anything. I have tried them with balderdash, as you try toxics on a dog, increasing the dose each time ; but I have never found I gave them more than they could swallow. I shall certainly end by being somebody ; and you mustn't blame me for it, but only the sapient laws of our country, which have given political power to the morally blind, deaf, and blear-eyed. If you tie a slippery rope to a housetop, and set a ladder beside the rope, you must expect people to prefer the ladder mode of ascension. Now, the slippery rope is hard work, the ladder is universal suffrage, and the housetop is honour and affluence. I have said."

He spoke in a flippant, arrogant tone of persiflage ; but it sounded rather as if he felt the humiliation of being seen in such apparently low estate by a man with whom he had lived on terms of equality, and this had something to do with the affected self-complacency of his remarks. Charles de Niel had never much liked Sixte Marjolain, though his pleasant spirits and free-handed ways used to amuse him. He rated his companion at his proper value as being extravagant, good-tempered, not much loaded with heart, a liar by instinct, and brave neither morally nor

physically. This was in their student-days. As Sixte Marjolain stood before him now, with his handsome selfish face, his *béret* jauntily perched on the side of his head, his moustache-tips waxed and twisted into hooks, and his sneering mouth ejecting tobacco-smoke by abrupt jets, it seemed to Charles de Niel as if all the evil characteristics of the man had deepened, whilst the good ones had diminished. He looked less blithe of mood and less generous than formerly, but more full of conceit and bombast; while the uneasy way in which he had halted on the beach, before recognising his friend, appeared to indicate that his courage was not of that sort which rages within lions.

"I suppose you belong to the International?" remarked Charles de Niel, with something of a shrug after a rapid survey of him.

"Of course," answered Marjolain, proceeding to roll a second cigarette, which he lighted with the remnant of the first. "I am very candid, though, in telling you that, for being a Public Prosecutor, you might have me arrested for the avowal. I shouldn't care though, for they wouldn't give me more than six months, and six months' imprisonment for the good cause, as we say in our clap-trap, would advance my political prospects wonderfully. I see, however, I may soon have another chance of advancement than that which I should gain by losing my liberty. Have you seen the papers to-night, 4th July? There is something about the candidature of a Prussian to the throne of Spain. This may stir up war. And if we only have a war and get sacked, in comes the Republic and up I go to the topmost rung of the ladder, like quicksilver when there's fire underneath. It's thinking of this brought me out to

stroll in the moonlight. I've been to a wedding-supper, and wine and ambition combined have driven drowsiness away. Besides, if you wait here another half-hour, you'll see the fisher-girls pass to meet the smacks at the creek yonder. Some of the girls are pretty and not straitlaced; I am on good terms with all the pretty ones." And he stroked his moustache, winking.

Charles de Niel did not attach much importance to the rumour of war; and he wished to cut short this interview, which was growing distasteful to him. He said coldly: "You must feel conscious yourself, Marjolain, of having fallen low indeed when you are reduced to hoping that we may be beaten in a war in order that you may rise. I wish I could have met you under pleasanter circumstances; but I am bound to warn you, both as an old comrade and as a magistrate, to keep out of the clutch of the law. If I were ever bound to prosecute you, I assure you I should do it without pity."

"I am convinced I could trust you to do that," laughed Marjolain carelessly; "but," added he, stung in his vanity, "who told you that I hoped for a defeat, or that I was dependent on it for my rise? I said that if we *were* sacked I should prosper, but the wise man has two strings to his bow, and one of the strings should be feminine. What should you say if I were to marry a woman who would bring me a million for her dowry, who is of as good blood as yourself, and as beautiful as that sickle moon up above us, only younger and more tangible?"

If Sixte Marjolain had counted upon causing a sensation, he was served to his heart's desire. Charles de Niel started as if he had been struck. He turned on his companion

with a face blanched of all its colour, and with eyeballs glaring: "Great God!" he exclaimed aloud, "if this should be the man!" and he laid a hard, nervous, menacing grasp on the engraver's shoulder.

"Tell me this woman's name, Marjolain," he hissed rather than spoke. "Tell me the truth—no hesitation or lying; for I shall find out."

Marjolain receded a step. His cigarette had dropped from his mouth, and he too had paled. He succeeded in disengaging himself from Niel's grasp.

"If you can find out," he said, "why ask me? I am not free to mention names."

"Is it Mademoiselle de Barre?" shouted Charles de Niel, following him and seizing him again so roughly that Marjolain lurched forward and almost lost his balance.

The engraver's self-possession abandoned him. He saw this was no moment for trifling.

"How did you learn?" he stammered, astonished as much as frightened.

Charles de Niel pushed him from him with such violence that Marjolain staggered on the shingle, and would have fallen but for the smack's rudder, against which he tottered.

"Oh, God in heaven!" moaned the young magistrate, pressing his hands to his forehead, "sooner she had been dead than this! A being of this sort, and I who had been thinking it could only be one of those men who set their stamp on history." He moaned again with a distress which would have been shocking for any one who loved him to witness. Then he became suddenly calm, and walked to where Marjolain was still leaning, rubbing his elbow in a scared way and wondering whether it would not

be advisable to fly. "You must tell me everything," he said, in exactly the same tone he used in interrogating a prisoner. "Tell me how it began and what are your schemes. Sit on the boat there, if you like."

Sixte Marjolain was moved by a moment's impulse to be rebellious, but a glance at Charles de Niel's firm-set face showed him he was not to be trifled with. He was no hero was M. Marjolain, and he made a clean breast of it.

There is no reason for our going through the avowals exactly as they were uttered, for they took a long time in delivery, were full of quibbles, reticences, and evasions, and had in many cases to be extracted piecemeal by cross-questions. Taken in its substance, however, the story was a very old and oft-told one. Viviane de Barre had met Sixte Marjolain accidentally. She had gone out with her maid under pretence of sketching on the cliff. Once there she had sent her maid to wander in search of flowers, and it is to be supposed from the confession she had made to Charles de Niel himself, that her intention was, in her bitter despondency, to commit suicide by throwing herself over the cliff. Some sketches of hers, however, having got loose from her portfolio, were blown over the downs by the wind, at a moment when Marjolain, out loafing (it being a Monday), was passing by the spot; and he came hurrying up with them before she had risen from her sketching-stool to execute her self-murderous design. At a glance they were attracted towards each other, or rather, he simply admired her beauty; whilst she, in her romantic and morbid agitation, not only admired *his* beauty, but judged from his educated language and well-bred manners, forming such a contrast to his dress, that he was one of those

struggling geniuses with whom young girls' dreams are peopled. He was clever and plausible, though lazy and weak, and he soon introduced himself to her with a well-conceived story, which took a powerful hold of her imagination. He was an inborn artist, persecuted by his family for his vocation, and he was working for his bread. He might live at home in undignified and servile ease if he pleased, but he was ambitious of fame, and would not enter into any compromise with his self-esteem. These points of his story so like her own could not but kindle her sympathy. She met him again on the cliff, not by appointment but by seeming accident, though of course it was only "seeming." Then they saw each other more frequently, till her interest for him changed into love and took possession of her life. It is popularly accepted that women have the power of seeing through a man and detecting all that is false in him. This power would appear to serve them only with men they do not love, for Viviane de Barre never suspected Sixte Marjolain. She wove her own generous fancies round his descriptions of himself, took him for her hero, worshipped him, confided in him, and would listen to the recital of his imaginary struggles, his hopes, his disappointments, as if chapters of Holy Writ were being read to her. They never could see each other anywhere but in the open air, in a museum or a church ; but once a day at least Sixte passed by her father's house at an appointed hour, that they might exchange glances. As soon as she should be of age she had sworn most solemnly to marry him. This was the tale in its simplicity. Sixte Marjolain related it in a way to show that the love was all on Viviane's side, not on his. He looked to the profit of the

match, feeling sure that the De Barres would not disinherit their only child, though they might at first threaten to do so. Viviane had often offered him money out of her allowance to help him set up a studio ; but though she had cried at his refusal to accept it, he had been wise enough to persist in this refusal, in order that his disinterestedness might remain above suspicion. He wound up by declaring that the marriage would take place, notwithstanding all impediments that might be thrown into his way by Charles de Niel or anybody else, "unless something better turned up"—the "something better" being probably, in his eyes, another match where there would be as much money, but less risks ; or a revolutionary windfall which should make him rich at a sweep and spare him the necessity of marrying at all ; this last, much the cheeriest prospect.

Dawn had broken when Marjolain, in some extenuation of tongue and mind, came to the end of his compulsory recital. Charles de Niel said but a dozen words to him in final reply, and these words were a fair warning that Mdlle. de Barre should be apprised of all the real circumstances of Sixte's life and character. At this, M. Sixte shrugged his shoulders scoffingly.

"You may tell her what you please," he said. "It will harm you in her opinion more than me." And upon this they parted.

Charles de Niel returned to his hotel, threw himself dressed on his bed, and lay there, not sleeping, but in a fever of thought, for two hours. At nine he rose, and changed his evening clothes for morning ones, and at ten o'clock set out on foot for the house of President de Barre. He was to have the privilege of calling every day—that was

understood ; and so, though the hour was a little early, Madame de Barre received him without surprise, cordially. She was in the garden with Viviane, working at tapestry ; but after a few moments' desultory conversation, she made a pretence of having something to fetch indoors, and left the supposed lovers alone, thinking to please them. Charles de Niel did not pause one moment before discharging what he had deliberately judged to be a sacred duty. He was seated on a garden stool, she on a chair underneath a tree. He leaned forward, and said, in a quiet, firm voice : " Mademoiselle, I have come to warn you that the man on whom you have bestowed your affections can never make you happy. He is altogether unworthy of you."

She rose, shivering with amazement from head to foot, dropped her work, and flashed at him a look of such indignation and contempt that any man might well have recoiled. But he had come prepared for this, and, though he flushed under her scathing glance, he made a movement of his hand, as though to say : " Only hear me to the end. You shall speak afterwards." She sat down again with a sort of shrug ; he drew his seat closer to hers, and spoke. It was not a denunciatory speech. He exaggerated nothing : he simply described Sixte Marjolain as he knew him ; and the bare truth, in this instance, would have been convincing enough to anybody not biassed. But when was woman in love not biassed ? Unfortunate Charles de Niel did not know women—least of all a woman in love. Had Viviane's face been of marble, sculptured to express the image of Disdain, it could not have been more rigidly fixed in cold scorn and indifference than it was during the

whole time Charles de Niel spoke. She seemed not to hear, not to care, not to be aware of his presence. She took up her fallen tapestry and worked at it. Only once, when he made some revelation on which he had earnestly relied to destroy her love for the man so beneath her, a flitting smile of contempt more than usually strong curled her lip. This speechless attitude unnerved Charles de Niel. Had she cried, protested, argued with him, abused him even, his fortitude would not have been impaired. But this ineffable scorn and unbelief froze and finally silenced him. He broke off, looked at her in dismay, and faltered: "So it is possible that I have not yet succeeded in convincing you?"

She rose and laughed outright—a laugh full of hatred, disdain, and defiance. Her eyes were aglow, and her beautiful face, which had turned ashy white at his first words, had now become crimson in its passion.

"Listen, Monsieur de Niel," she answered calmly, thrusting each word like a dagger's point. "Yesterday, I thought you were a man of honour, and I thanked God on my knees—yes, on my knees—this night for having sent me such a friend. I see now that you are like the rest. In Sixte Marjolain's world, when a man has anything to say of another he speaks it frankly before his face; in ours, it is the fashion to traduce a rival behind his back, to breathe venomous calumnies upon him, not one of which the speaker would dare utter aloud. If you have a face that can blush at a woman's contempt, M. de Niel, let me never see you again. Inform my parents of my secret if you please; it is indifferent to me. If you do, I shall act as I told you I would yesterday. As to your slanders,

hark to this. If you were to swear all you have just said by your hopes of salvation, I would not believe you; if you were to swear it me on your dying pillow, with the crucifix of the Saviour held before your eyes, I would not believe you; nay, if I were to see with my own eyes the things you have foully invented, I would sooner doubt the evidence of my senses than believe Sixte Marjolain capable of anything that is not noble, generous, and true."

When love rises to such proportions as this, even simple men like Charles de Niel can understand its majesty. He bent his head without a word. He had nothing more to say.

III.

Some ten months after this the city of M—— was in some commotion, the reason being this, that an attempt to establish a commune like that of Paris had been made there and had failed. A couple of days' fighting had got the better of the insurgents' valour; a few days' shooting and pursuing had got the better of their political constancy; and the scene was one of rebels being hunted out of cellars, garrets, sewer-pipes, under all the disguises one can imagine, vowing their innocence as soon as caught, and whining for mercy. This is not a pleasant picture. But the fugitives seemed to consider that shooting was not pleasant either.

The ringleaders had, as usual, with scarcely a single exception, escaped. That is always the way with ringleaders. Detectives were watching for them at street corners, sending telegraphic despatches about them, posting descriptions of their persons on dead walls, and in a

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general way looking for them with great energy wherever they were least likely to be found. Among the rogues being thus hunted for was the man described on the posters as "The so-called General Sixte Marjolain."

M. Marjolain had been quite right in his previsions of what his country's defeat might do for him. The 4th September revolution had caused him to be elected a Commandant of National Guards; the Communal insurrection had made a General of him. He had done little fighting in either military capacity. While the Prussian war lasted he had decided that he could be more useful to the Republic he loved by remaining at M——, and guarding its interests, than by going to fight under Chanzy on the Loire, and so risking the life of a good fellow and a staunch radical. During his few days' generalship he had been too much occupied in taking care of some public money he and his men had discovered in the municipal coffers, to have a thought for anything else. This, however, did not lessen the peril of his position. On the contrary, it was pretended that to cover his retreat, when the chase after him had become rather too pressing, he had ordered some acolytes of his to set fire to a block of houses, after the now approved democratic method, that is, with petroleum. He was well known from having strutted about so complacently in his uniform during war time. There were photographs of him, booted and spurred, in shop windows. The detectives seemed more anxious to find him than anybody else. After a few days' hunting, it was said they had received positive information that he was lurking in a house on the eastern outskirt of the city, but in which particular house they were as yet unaware.

It so happened that in one of the suspected dwellings lodged Charles de Niel. Nine months had dealt radically with him too. In the first place, he had been of course deprived of his office when the Republicans came in after Sedan, and in the next the collapse of several financial and Imperial companies, in which most of his father's fortune was invested, had nearly ruined him. This catastrophe had killed his father, and the troubles of all sorts resulting from the war had also hastened his mother's end. He was now an orphan, without any near relative to care for or be cared for by. During the campaign he had fought on the Loire as a private soldier. At the peace he had come to live at M——, where the Communal insurrection had taken him unawares—so much so, indeed, that he had had no means of joining the regular forces which were putting down the rebellion. He had remained indoors during all the fighting; and also during the few days' turmoil afterwards. His means of living were some hundred thousand francs he had managed to save from the wreck of his family property. As soon as the country was quiet again he thought of practising at the bar. One may add that he was viewed with some mistrust in M——, not because he was an ex-Bonapartist, but because he was ruined.

Thus much for his material circumstances. As to his moral condition, it had been noticed by all who knew Charles de Niel that in that first week in July, '70, when his marriage had begun to be talked of, a complete and curious change had come over him. It was like a sudden, subtle deterioration of all the faculties which conduce to activity, ambition, interest in life; but no one guessed the reason of this transformation as we can do. Charles,

de Niel had not seen Viviane since that morning when she had ordered him never to come into her presence again. A few days later the war had broken out he had been recalled hastily to his post, and the events which followed in rapid succession having necessarily adjourned all matrimonial schemes, he had been able to confine himself to a merely formal correspondence with the De Barres, without this being deemed at all odd. He had not disclosed Viviane's secret either to her parents or to anybody else. He suffered people to believe that he was going to marry her, and they did believe it, until after the loss of his fortune he wrote, as in duty bound, to say that being no longer in a position to support a wife, he begged leave to withdraw from the engagement. This method of proceeding, tallying so completely with French notions of the becoming, President de Barre had merely replied that he was grieved to hear of Charles's bereavement and losses, that he would have given him his daughter all the same (which was not true), but that since M. Charles deemed it well to retract his engagement, he could not but defer to his wishes. So Charles de Niel was free, as well as orphaned, ruined, and well-nigh friendless.

But not free in mind. Ever since the hour when he had first seen Viviane, and especially since that hideous moment when she had accused him of calumny, he had known no peace. He had carried about her image with him everywhere—on the battle-fields, in solitude, amid all his sorrows. His friends called him changed. He was like a man who carried the stigma of a crime with him. From the moment she, who was all in all to him, sus-

pected his honour, it was as if the entire world despised him. His ambition had all now converged to one fixed idea, and that engrossed him as ideas do engross men to whom thought comes slowly. He wished to clear himself in her sight, no matter at what cost, no matter how. If he could bring Viviane to see that he had spoken truthfully, and from no other motive but her welfare, he would ask for nothing more. He would be willing to die the next minute.

It was evening when the military and the police arrived to explore the suburb where the ex-Procureur lived. Charles de Niel was reading at his table by lamplight. The house where he lodged was in a quiet street, with villas all detached, and standing in gardens; the least noise of carriage-wheels or steps could be heard from one end of the thoroughfare to the other. Of a sudden—it must have been towards nine at night—Charles de Niel did hear sounds which had become very familiar—namely, the tramping of soldiers in great numbers, both before and behind the house. He got up, lifted a corner of a curtain, and saw that his own villa, and those adjoining it on both sides, were surrounded. It mattered little to him. He sat down again to read, and would have continued to remain where he was, despite all the tramping; but before he had been seated a minute, another and different noise struck his ear. This time it was a clambering over a wall close to his window—then a soft fall. He was on a ground-floor parlour, looking to the front, but there was another room that served to dine in, and which led out of that where he was sitting; the door of it was open, and it was from that direction that the noise came. He

held his breath and listened. There was a rapping at the window-panes which looked on to the garden ; somebody was knocking. Charles de Niel rose, walked fearlessly into the other room, and opened the window. A man emerged from the darkness and rushed in, haggard, scared, and with clothes torn ; he held a revolver in his hand, and but for that would have had all the appearance of a hunted beast, which he was. Though circumstances and terror had altered him, the man was easy to recognise. It was Sixte Marjolain.

There was a moment's wonder-stricken silence, and the two men looked at each other without a word ; but at sight of Niel a ghastly look of despair had shot swiftly across the hunted rebel's face. He turned instinctively as if he would have bolted again ; but he had not the strength left. So he threw his revolver down, and said, in a choked voice, the voice of a man at bay : " I am at your mercy, Niel ; remember that, though you once said you would show me none." And he sank shivering into a seat.

Charles de Niel for a moment made no answer. He eyed the trembling wretch before him with a look half of wonder half of pity. Then another expression stole over his features. He walked up to Sixte Marjolain, rested a hand on his shoulder, and said in a peculiar voice : " Listen, and answer quickly, Sixte ; does *she* still love you ? "

" Yes," faltered Sixte, amazed and shrinking.

" She believes in you ? "

" Yes." (This was rather an impatient nod than a word.)

" And she is still determined to marry you ? "

" She will not marry me now, because in another ten

minutes I shall be arrested, and in another six months dead," answered Marjolain, with a dogged and expressive gesture at the windows, outside of which the tramping and voices of soldiers were heard growing louder. "But if it had not been for this," added he, with some fire of defiance rising to his eyes, "she would have married me."

"Then stand up," said Charles de Niel, with perfect calm. "Now lift up your hand, and swear after me. Swear to be an honest man, and to be faithful and good to her. On that condition I save you."

"Save me!" gasped Marjolain, with feverish exultation; "save me, how?"

"Will you swear?" asked Charles de Niel.

"I will do more than swear; I will keep my oath," faltered Marjolain, with eyes full of anguish, as if with the fear that he was being hoaxed; and he extended his hand.

Charles de Niel nodded, went to a bureau and unlocked it. He took out a few notes and a pocket-book.

"Here is money and a passport," he said; "you can hide in the cellar whilst I go out and say that it is I who am Sixte Marjolain. They do not know me, so they will arrest me, and when I have been led off you can escape. By the time they find out who I am you will have got clear away and they will not harm me."

Marjolain muttered some thanks, but Niel cut these short. He took the Communist by the arm, led him out of the room, and down a staircase, into a small wood-cellar. At the moment of closing the door and handing his rival the key, he said, quite quietly, but looking Sixte Marjolain in the face again: "Remember, an oath is a serious thing, Sixte, and even you who affect to believe in nothing may

acknowledge that it was a Providence which placed me on your path to-night. Try and profit by the lesson."

These were his last words. When Marjolain left the cellar an hour afterwards, the quarter was deserted. There were no soldiers there, and Marjolain's passport took him safely through all the streets of the town and past all the sentries. It was only a few days later, when he had safely crossed the French frontier, that he learned this: that the notorious Sixte Marjolain had been arrested and shot. He had not been tried by court-martial. The officer who apprehended him had received previous orders to execute him summarily.

IV.

The mistake in identity was never discovered, for Frenchmen, especially criminals, are buried within four-and-twenty hours of death. The real Sixte Marjolain recently returned to France, under a new name, and married Viviane. The parents were opposed to the marriage of their daughter to a Swiss adventurer—for he gave himself out for a Swiss artist—but Mdlle. Viviane was of age; so, from necessity they granted their consent. Whether the "adventurer" keeps the oath he swore as the price of his life is a secret only known to himself, his wife, and the man who was interred under his name. But many so-called "free-thinkers" make a religion of superstition, and Sixte Marjolain was superstitious. He believed in the power of dead men to haunt and punish live ones.

THE SCEPTIC.

THE SCEPTIC:

A TALE OF MARRIED LIFE.



I.

MID-DAY Mass being ended in the church of St. Wolfram, of the town of A——, the holy building was emptied of all its worshippers, excepting some twenty ladies, who grouped themselves on rush-chairs near the different confessionals. It was a Friday, and there were consequently no weddings. The penitents had the church all to themselves, and the solemn silence was eminently suited to pious meditation. However, the penitents being for the most part old spinsters, preferred to chatter in whispers; confession was to them a refreshing break in the week's solitary idleness, and they made the most of it.

Truth compels one to admit that the ladies were unequally distributed, for not less than twelve out of the twenty were gathered round the confessional of l'Abbé Mouillot. But you had only to look at this comely priest waddling across the aisle from the sacristy to understand how great a favourite he must needs be. He was plump and rosy, and his silvery hair, which fluffed over his

smooth forehead, crowned a face in which dimples and benevolence had an equal part with serenity and playful humour. No man had more indulgence than he for little sins or large ones. His gentle chiding brought greater comfort than the absolution of other priests; and, what is more, he was possessed of inexhaustible patience—hurrying no one, suffering his penitents to disclose their sins in their own way, and only encouraging them with a kindly word when, by a pause of undue length, they seemed to appeal for it. We must decline to entertain the supposition that if l'Abbé Mouillot sat out long confessions so obligingly, it was because he dropped off placidly to sleep at their commencement. The Abbé having entered his confessional and closed the door, the lady first on the rank stepped out and knelt in one of the lateral boxes, and the remainder, feigning to keep their eyes on their missals, settled down to a comfortable tattle.

“That’s the Colonel’s sister,” remarked one spinster.

“If she confess but half what is on her conscience, we shall have to wait an hour,” mumbled a second, and both tittered.

At this moment the folding-doors of the church were softly pushed back, and a feminine form glided towards the holy-water basin. In the dim light of the entrance it could be seen that she was attired with more taste and richness than are usual in country towns, and that she wore a veil. Approaching the confessional, she lifted the veil, and then a murmur of astonishment and curiosity ran round.

“It is Madame Paul d’Arlay !”

“Oh, oh ! her husband has renounced the devil then !”

“What can have brought her two leagues to confession ? There is a good church enough at St. Ricquier.”

"And see how flurried she looks! One may guess her two years' honeymoon has been chequered with a cloud at last."

"Dear Madame d'Arley, how delighted we are to see you looking so fresh and lovely! We hope your dear husband and child are quite well."

The lady thus addressed with evident respect, and for whom all the penitents made way, was the wife of Paul d'Arley, one of the greatest of French novelists and playwrights. He had achieved his brilliant reputation when young, and it had increased with every new work he produced, because he wrote little, and for fame, not profit. At forty, having just been elected—some ten years before the customary age—to the French Academy, he had astonished everybody by marrying a pretty dowerless girl of twenty, the daughter of a country gentleman, and since his marriage he had lived a retired life on a little estate which he had bought near St. Ricquier. He was so distinguished a man that the families around felt honoured by his settling among them, but it was deemed singular that he should break so completely with Parisian society, which had idolised him, and it was thought stranger still that, sceptic as he was, he should have married into a family remarkable for religious devoutness. Paul d'Arley was, indeed, considerably more than a sceptic: he had been called the successor of Voltaire. He was an atheist of the aggressive sort, who had never feigned conformity, as most of his countrymen do, but who, like Edmond About, Emile Augier, and Ste. Beuve, had missed no occasion of assailing the Catholic Church with irony and bitterly contemptuous ridicule. Every one of his works had been banned by the Papal Index, much to his amusement, and his last book, published about a year before

his marriage, had attained a success of startling proportions, by being denounced in episcopal mandates throughout every diocese in France. It was conceivable that after this a devout Catholic should have given his daughter to Paul d'Arlay, in the hope that marriage might reclaim him ; but it was inconceivable that the renowned author should have been impelled to his ill-assorted marriage, unless it were from the fascination of Aimée Deschamps' pretty face.

People generally accepted this explanation, for Madame d'Arlay's was just one of those faces that turn men's heads. Small and daintily rounded, she had large soft blue eyes, rich and wavy chestnut hair, and an adorable little mouth, over which a sweet smile was always playing like sunlight. There was no particular expression on her features but that of amiability. She looked good and weak ; unable to say no, and not very sure whether she ought to say yes. A physiognomist would not have expected intellect from her, and yet it would have surprised anybody to see her do or say anything that was foolish. She was a Frenchwoman to her finger-tips ; dressed and walked well ; carried herself without embarrassment or effrontery ; had little graces of gesture, glance, and manner, which proved consciousness of always having admiring or critical eyes bent on her ; and summed up in her attractive person all the outward perfections of the gentlewoman. She had been agitated on entering the church, but it was good to see how, in the presence of older members of her sex, she at once resumed her composure ; gave to each the bow and civil word that was correct, and took her place modestly on the furthest chair to wait her turn.

She would have to wait long if deference for her husband's celebrity, and perhaps inquisitiveness to see how

the wife of so eminent a reprobate would demean herself at the tribunal of penitence, had not induced the other ladies to waive their precedence. When the Colonel's sister had finished—and to do this lady justice, she had settled her little account with Heaven in half-an-hour—the next lady motioned to Madame d'Arley, and the others ratified this arrangement by polite smirks. Madame d'Arley reddened a little as she accepted the courtesy, but it was manifestly very welcome to her, and gracefully bowing her acknowledgments, she passed into the confessional and dropped on her knees. Then she heaved a sigh.

"Father, it is I, Madame d'Arley," she whispered through the grating. "I told you the other day that I wished to consult you on something very important, and I have taken advantage of my husband being absent on a visit to drive into A——."

"It will give me pleasure to hear you, my daughter," answered the priest's kind voice. "When I last dined at your charming house I noticed that you were pre-occupied, but I have been hoping that your little troubles were more imaginary than real."

"O Father! they are not little troubles—no woman was ever so unhappy as I am!" moaned Madame d'Arley. "I am devoured by the sin of curiosity; it leaves me no peace; it will make me ill before long if I do not yield to it. Can you fancy that, although I have been married two years, my husband will not allow me to read one of his books!"

"Ah!"

"No, he forbids me. There is not a copy of his works in our house—if friends come to see us, he contrives to change the conversation as soon as it turns on his writ-

ings, and if I question him myself, he closes my lips with a joke. He is so affectionate and gentle that I bore with this for a time, though it cost me many a pang, but latterly we have been visited by that Madame de Marceuil whom you saw at our table the other night—a young widow, very forward and ill-natured, who I am sure wanted to marry Paul, and who takes a delight in making me miserable.”

“Come, come, my daughter”——

“Ah, but it's true, else why should she compliment me so tauntingly on not having read my own husband's books? She has an aggravating way about her which makes a woman's blood tingle. She recurs to the subject at all hours; hinting that the books are full of attacks on religion, immoral, abounding in details about Paul's early life; and that my husband and I are both acting very properly, he in forbidding me to read them, I in obeying him. Was there ever a more humiliating position for a wife? So I am to be the only woman in France who is not to know the writings which have made my Paul's reputation, and our boy, who will grow up to glory in his father's name, will pore over books which his mother has never opened! Tell me, Father, that I may go and buy the works to read in private, for I feel I am being treated like a child.”

Now l'Abbé Mouillot was not one of those priests who creep into houses and lead captive silly women. He was an honest man, who, perhaps because he was a little dull, had never understood that spiritual fervour should impel a priest to put man and wife asunder. He had not read Paul d'Arley's excommunicated books, but had heard of them, and well guessed why their author should object to let such dangerous literature be perused by a young and

innocent wife, on whom he doted. There are well-meaning priests who would have advised Aimée d'Arley by all means to read the books, and to try persistently to convert her husband, in order that he might write no more like them. But l'Abbé Mouillot knew what perils lurk under such injudicious counsels. He had received courtesy and kindness from Paul d'Arley, respected his honourable character, could not help revering his genius, and the advice which he gave to the author's wife was that of a friend and peacemaker.

"My daughter, your first duty is to obey your husband," he said with gentle firmness. "Admitting that M. d'Arley does not share your faith, God has ways of His own for bringing back His lost sheep, and a wife should be an instrument of happiness in her household, not contention."

"But it is so hard to be told that one's husband has written this and that, and not to be able to join with people in their admiration or rebut their criticisms."

"It is a trial, but wait patiently. Your husband will, no doubt, end by removing his prohibition, and you will be the more contented then for having passed submissively through your ordeal."

"You have no pity for me," murmured Aimée. "It may be years before my husband relents, and Mdme. de Marœuil says the books are so interesting!"

"Heigh, there we have it!" exclaimed the priest, whose voice betokened that he was smiling. "The serpent has tempted you to eat of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, and, after exhausting ingenious reasons for succumbing, you are obliged to confess the true one. Go home, my dear daughter, and read in the 3rd chapter of Genesis

what the sin of curiosity and disobedience cost our first mother. Your home is a little paradise—see that you do not throw away its tranquil joys.”

Mdme. d’Arley rose from her knees, looking calm ; but her body was in a fever. She had hoped the priest would ratify the sophistries she had formed to justify her in disobeying, and his refusal to do so added to the irritation of her nerves without allaying any of the desires that seethed in her mind. She had been too much petted not to resent any crossing of her wishes as an unkindness, and if it had not been for the sacredness of the spot she would have burst out crying.

The sun was shining gloriously, and the streets were full of mid-day bustle as she emerged from the church and made her way with quick steps towards the market-place, where her carriage was waiting. But why, instead of crossing the market-place, did she abruptly pause and turn, reddening, down a side-street? There was a bookseller’s shop a few doors down, and in the window was conspicuously displayed a yellow placard, advertising in red and black letters the “Complete Works of Paul d’Arley, of the French Academy.”

There they were, the works—four novels and five plays—in bright new covers, pink and primrose, with titles alluring enough to open the eyes of a blind man.

Aimée’s bosom heaved fast, and the throbbings of her heart became physically painful. Once—twice she turned away and retraced her steps. The third time a customer was coming out of the shop, and fancying she was about to enter, stood aside to let her pass ; here was the temptation : she seized it and walked in.

“Have you *all* Paul d’Arley’s works?”

"Yes, Madame ; the last editions have just come from Paris."

"I will buy the complete set, please," said Aimée, in a voice that quavered.

II.

"The Elms," Paul d'Arley's country seat—within bow-shot of the ancient abbey-town of St. Ricquier, now dwindled into a village—was dignified, like most French country houses, with the title of *château*. It was a pretty, modern mansion, nestling amid clumps of the trees from which the estate derived its name, and surrounded by an expanse of lawn and shrubberies, which was large or small according as you called it garden or park. Mdme. d'Arley insisted it was a park ; the author styled it *jardinnet* (diminutive garden), and similar contestations went on between them as to the correct appellations of a conservatory and dovecot, which Aimée was for dubbing Orangery and Tower respectively, while her incredulous husband submitted that he would take up with these names when the one had produced an orange and the other stood a siege.

Such as it was, Paul d'Arley loved the place well. Those who wondered that he should settle so contentedly in retirement had little knowledge of his character, and less understanding of the satiety which comes of long indulgence in the pleasures of big cities. D'Arley had lived for twenty years in the most brilliant society of Paris—the equal of princes and statesmen, the pet of great ladies, actresses, and artists, the envy of tyros. Few men had enjoyed life as he had, or better deserved to enjoy it ; for he had carved his way to fame and fortune without

patronage or charlatanry, by mere dint of hard toil and talent. Every work he had produced, whether novel or play, had cost him more than two years' reflection and assiduous labour; and lest this should seem strange to fertile literary manufacturers in these our times, it may be added that d'Arley had received repeated offers of large sums to work faster, but had declined, alleging rather scornfully that he would print nothing that could not be bequeathed to posterity.

To do his country neighbours justice, there was little in the great author's works to encourage a belief that he would ever develop into a family man; for he had been a contemner of marriage. He had, in fact, derided most things which the simple reverence. Taking exceptional, and often morbid, passions for his texts, he had employed the resources of incomparable style, masterly perception of character, dramatic power and descriptive facility unrivalled, to defend—nay extol—offences against what the world terms morals, and he social prejudices. France is the only country where theories such as his durst be published; and even Frenchmen, so tolerant of startling paradoxes, would not have brooked from an author of less genius philosophy so deliberately cynical and axioms insultingly launched against all the conventions that hold society together. What saved Paul d'Arley was, next to his talent, his evident good faith, and for this reason no one would have applied an epithet of reprobation to his works. They were books over which thinkers pondered, and which *dilettanti* studied as splendid works of art. But to the vulgar they were poison, and d'Arley knew this so well that from the day of his marriage he had taken the most careful precaution that his wife should not read them.

For the truth is, he deeply loved his fair young wife. After draining the intoxicating cup of worldly excitements, he had discovered that there is in domestic happiness a greater joy than all, and he was sincerely grateful to the woman who had revealed this to him. Her gods were not his, but in the practices of her innocent devotions he found a secret charm stirring the innermost chords of his heart. When she knelt down to say her prayers at night, and invoke blessings on his head—when she set out in cold or rain to church, or conformed to the laws of her religion as to fasting—when he saw her act at all times as if an invisible eye were controlling her conduct, it was as if some beautiful scene of poetical legendry were being performed before him. She did not know how often he shaded his eyes to watch her making the sign of the cross, nor divine what was passing in his mind when he would sit down beside her, and, taking her hands in his, ask her to relate him some stories from her Bible. He did not believe in these things. To him they were fables, silly or sublime; but not for the world would he have shaken his wife's faith in them; and gradually there had grown up in him a feeling that he would rather his son, and any other children he might have, should grow up to be God-fearing like their mother than infidels like himself. He looked forward to an age when mankind should be guided wholly by reason; but felt that this age had not yet come—for his wife.

So he lived happy, falsifying all conjectures, puzzling every observer. He was a handsome man, rather above the middle height, a little bald and shortsighted, but constitutionally strong, thanks to regular diet and exercise. With his waxed moustache, high forehead, and firm chin, he looked like a soldier. His face teemed with expression, but the expression was not soft, for like all men who

have been much criticised he was a trifle arrogant, and the easy rapidity of his rise in life made him speak with too much contempt of those who had been less fortunate than himself. He would not admit that he owed anything to exceptional abilities. He said it was only hard work that had made him ; and one of his grievances against religion was that it taught men to rely on idle supplications rather than on the courageous self-exertions which he for his own part had found enough to conquer all difficulties. It was not surprising that such a man should have earned a character for hardness and pride, and yet never did a man yield himself more good-humouredly to the domination of a young wife. His tenderness, playful gentleness, and cheerful submission to all her wishes, were things to see ; the little woman had wholly subjugated him, and not until two years after his marriage did he leave her for a single day. It was a summons to the bedside of a relative who was thought to be dying which had induced him very reluctantly to quit her at last, and which had also afforded Aimée the opportunity of going to A—— and buying his books, as we have seen. Paul d'Arley had counted on being away three days ; he was compelled to remain absent more than three weeks, and when he was at last free to return he travelled back to St. Ricquier with a yearning impatience to resume the peaceful life to which this brief interruption had but added new charms.

But he had no sooner set foot in his house than he perceived some great change had occurred.

It was Ash Wednesday, and Paul, as he journeyed in the train, had been telling himself with pathetic amusement that he should find his wife in a black dress—for like a good Catholic she wore dark attire on fast days—and be regaled with a fish dinner. But Aimée came to

the door and met him, tricked out in silks and colours, and with her hair piled up in some extraordinary Parisian fashion. There was more of the woman, less of the wife and mother in her, and she seemed excited, though her greeting was gushingly affectionate. When Paul went upstairs to change his dress, he noticed in passing through his wife's room that the crucifix which used to hang over the bed had been removed, but thinking it might be in repair he paid little attention. When, however, on coming downstairs he found the dining-room ablaze with wax-candles, the table decked with flowers, and a prettily written *menu* of rich dainties lying beside his glass, he was astonished, and glanced at Aimée. She was sitting red and nervous, as if playing a part.

"My dear child, you must have mislaid your almanack," he said, smiling. "This is a fast day."

"Yes, dear, I know it is," replied Aimée, in a voice that slightly trembled.

"Well, but we shall both be excommunicated together. Has our good bishop given you an indulgence?"

"What need of indulgences, Paul? I agree with you that it is time women shook off the superstitions which pervert all enjoyment of the good things of life into sins."

There was a moment's silence. Paul d'Arley had turned white as the tablecloth, and motioned to the servant to retire.

"I am not aware that I ever told you that, Aimée."

"No, but you have written it—and oh, Paul, don't be angry with me, but I have been reading all your books!" She crossed the room, and threw herself at his feet, embracing him with both her arms and gazing into his face with endearing entreaty. "I could not resist any longer, darling, and I know now why you kept your writings from

me, fearing I should be too childish to understand them. But do not dread that. Some of the things frightened me at first and made me cry, but as I went on reading the scales dropped off my eyes. Oh, how silly you must have thought me with my little mummeries and foolish creeds—but you are so great, noble, and good, and never let me see what you thought in your tender unwillingness to wound me! Why are you trembling, dearest? I mean to be your own wife now, the sharer of your glory and of all your thoughts. Everything that I had learned has been clean sponged away, and my heart and mind are like the blank pages of a new book on which you shall write what beliefs you please. Look up at me, dearest. I never knew how much I loved you till I guessed from your works what a sacrifice you had made in marrying a silly little thing like me!”

Words cannot depict the desolate expression that had settled on Paul d'Arlay's face as his wife spoke. He had started to his feet mechanically, assisting her to rise, and she recoiled at seeing him stand speechless, as if an irremediable catastrophe had overtaken him. When he spoke at length it was with a groan.

“Tell me the truth, Aimée: it was Madame de Marœuil who lent you those books?”

“No, no, Paul; I went into the town and bought them myself. But why do you look at me like that, dear? You frighten me.”

“Unhappy child! I am sure it was Madame de Marœuil who advised you to buy them,” he murmured; then abruptly he tossed his head and broke out with a wrath that was awful: “Woe betide that woman! She has come into my house with a torch, and let her see to herself! I will wreak a vengeance on her that shall wring ten

thousand tears from her eyes for every one that she has made you shed."

Aimée uttered a cry and attempted to restrain her husband; but he disengaged himself, rushed from the room and hurried to the stables. The groom who was there thought his master had gone mad, for Paul shouted for a saddle, helped to strap it on, and before the bit was fairly in the horse's mouth sprang into the stirrups and spurred into the night at full gallop. He rode towards the house where Madame de Marœuil lived, about five miles off, and some of the tardy peasants who met him on the road must have thought of him as the groom did—or that he was possessed of the devil, for they were pious people in those parts.

Madame de Marœuil was far from expecting such a visit. She was a handsome young widow, thoroughly Parisian, cool, coquettish, and heartless. Married early to a man old enough to be her grandfather, she had hailed her widowhood as a merciful release, and had lost no time in setting her cap at Paul d'Arlay, whose fame, polished manners, and manly character had fascinated her. But it was not out of spite at having been rebuffed by him that she had tried to push his wife to disobedience. Madame de Marœuil was one of those women who do harm by nature, as nettles sting. To tattle and invent scandal, to estrange wife from husband, and lend a hand to intrigues in which the honour of families was blasted, were to her mere pastimes. As to connubial relations, she had a theory that among men there is not one but that is peccant, and she argued that women owe each other mutual protection to resist marital tyranny. This did not prevent her abusing her own sex in the hearing of men and despising it cordially in secret.

It chanced that when Paul d'Arley arrived Madame de Marœuil was reading one of his best novels, *La Femme d'un Sot*, which she had perused many times from detecting several comforting analogies between herself and the heroine. She gave a start at hearing the door-bell violently clang; but before she could run to the window, Paul had darted into the room, covered with mud, breathless and menacing. Without taking off his hat he rushed to her and seized her frail wrists as if he would break them.

"Wretched woman, what infernal spirit of mischief led you to disturb my wife's mind with those books of mine?"

"Don't, Monsieur d'Arley, you're hurting me!" she cried in terror. "I never advised Madame d'Arley to read your books."

"You are lying!" he raved. "When I suffered you to visit my wife, I warned you of the conditions on which alone you might do it. I mistrusted your viperous tongue from the first."

Madame de Marœuil's features had blanched under Paul's flaming eyes. She struggled, panting, to free herself.

"I tell you to release me, sir, or I shall scream. I never did more than mention your books to your wife."

"Ah, that's it!" shouted Paul, pushing her back so roughly that she staggered. "You went in your hateful malice and excited her curiosity; but what have you given the poor little thing in exchange for that faith you destroyed in her? Could you endow her with the strong mind of a man to enable her to replace by unwavering reason the comfort which her religion brought her in every hour of trial? No; you never had such a thought; but in trying to soil the child's angel robe you only aimed at making her a demon of worldliness and depravity like yourself! But now quail—for as I am a living man you shall repent of

what you have done ! I will write a book, and expose you in it as in a pillory ; and you shall become so infamous that the lowest of your sex shall point their fingers at you ! ”

Madame de Marœuil bounded under this brutal threat.

“ Ah, this is too much ! ” she exclaimed. “ Your wife has been perverted by your books. Well, I am glad of it ! This is the retribution on you for the misery of thousands of other women whom your books have ruined. There was a time when I too believed that there was another world where the wretchedness of this life was compensated ; but you, and others like you, who are the perdition of our country, scoffed these illusions away, and what did you give me in exchange but the fine philosophy, that as we have nothing to live for, nothing to hope for, we should be stupid indeed not to get what pleasure we can out of this world ? Ah ! so you think to shatter the Cross in every household, and then to plant it as a talisman on your own hearth. But there is some justice yet ! You have thrown your impious books at God, and He has hurled them back on your roof-tree. So much the better ! ” and darting to the bell she pulled it. A servant appeared. “ Show out M. d’Arlay,” she cried.

III.

Not long after this the Paris papers announced that Paul d’Arlay and his charming young wife had taken a house in the Champs Elysées, and were coming to spend a few months there. As the private lives of great authors offer an engrossing interest to the French public, minutely accurate accounts were given of the Hôtel d’Arlay, and of Paul’s reasons for hiring it. It was said that so Parisian a

writer could not languish away from a city which is to all other cities what the sun is to the planetary system, and that he was impatient to exhibit to the world the winsome little woman who had detained him so long in exile. In the course of a few days cards were issued for Madame d'Arlay's first "At home."

Few guessed with what anguish Paul had drawn himself away from the "Elms;" and if we say few instead of none, it is because Madame de Marœuil had maliciously bruited the "ridiculous scene" which had taken place at her house, so that there were some who were aware that a skeleton existed in the great author's family cupboard. Paul had striven hard to undo the evil that had been wrought; and for several days tried everything that patient ingenuity and tender earnestness could suggest to bring back his wife to her discarded beliefs. But Faith is like a temple: when ruined, it can be rebuilt, but not in a week. Aimée was possessed with a burning desire to go to Paris and see her husband's plays performed on the stage, to hear him applauded, and to feel her heart ring with the echo of his praises. Such a wish could not be combated; and Paul took the only determination possible by resolving to bring his wife to Paris, and let her taste to her fill of the sensations which she coveted. He hoped that satiety would come to her as it had to him, making her long to renew their peaceful country life; and to hasten this end he decided that their baby should remain at St. Ricquier, the air of which was healthier for him than that of the capital.

Aimée flew to Paris like a bird uncaged. Everything in it was new to her, and the people most of all. The d'Arlays had a luxurious house, kept a carriage, a man cook, servants in livery, and all the appurtenances of a

mansion where large hospitality is to be exercised. During the first week after their arrival, not scores but hundreds of cards were left at the door; invitations poured in from ministers, princes, nobles, from the lords of art and letters, from everybody with a name or a purse; and then managers and publishers trooped up to the author's dwelling. Since his marriage Paul had finished a five-act comedy and commenced a novel. The comedy was at once accepted by the Théâtre Français and put in rehearsal; the novel was predicted in the papers to be the best he had ever written (though no reporter had obtained a glimpse of it), and the title was given: *Un Mariage d'Amour*. Once more that brazen din which the most art-enamoured public in the world raises round its favourites resounded about Paul d'Arley, and to Aimée this din was music.

She was not stinted of it, nor of anything else she fancied, for Paul was too shrewd to think he could cure any woman of Parisomania if he put the slightest restraint on her pleasure-seeking, and his policy was that of confectioners, who encourage their assistants to surfeit themselves with dainties at starting in order that they may be for ever after abstemious. One day, having scanned his wife's attire, he remarked that it would not do for Paris, and took her to the eminent M. Worth's.

"Monsieur Worth," he said, "I have brought you my wife, and give you *carte blanche*; she relies on you to make her presentable."

M. Worth smirked with the air of a man who sees an exquisite picture very poorly framed.

"If Madame will put herself in our hands, I think we shall be able to do justice to her rare beauty."

"That is exactly what she wants," said Paul pleasantly; "so say you make her a dozen dresses to begin with."

"O Paul! a dozen!" exclaimed Aimée, with her provincial notions of economy quite startled.

"My dear child, M. Worth will tell you that a dozen are not too many if you are to hold your own against your good friends. I even question whether they will be enough."

From M. Worth's, Aimée was taken to the bonnet-maker's, furrier's, lace-maker's, glover's, and finally to the jeweller's. Of some hundred thousand francs which had been lying at Paul's banker's, two-thirds melted away at once in preparations for making Aimée presentable to bebies of women, not one of whom was half as comely as herself. But Paul disbursed without counting. "When she reflects that we are wasting our boy's money, perhaps she will feel a twinge," was his calculation.

Aimée, however, was in no more mood for reflecting than is a person who drinks champagne for the first time. During the first month the novelty of her position made her just a little shy and awkward; at the end of the second month she wore her fine low dresses with ease, had learned to improve her complexion with potato-flour (*vulgo* violet-powder), and had discovered that Nature had not given her hair sufficient without a chignon. At the end of the third month she had already marked herself a place in society; her drawing-room was a resort for wits; she could herself launch a repartee; and from week to week she lived the customary life of a woman of the world in all respects save one—church-going. Nothing would persuade her to attend Sunday mass or any other religious celebration. When she went by a church, she could not help turning away her head and reddening, as though she were passing a house where she had done something wrong.

It was at the end of this third month that Paul d'Arley's

new comedy was brought out at the Théâtre Français. There was a general curiosity to note whether marriage, always a hazardous experiment with brain-workers, had made any difference in Paul's talent, and the house was crammed with celebrities. From first to last the piece was a triumphant success. Never had the author's dialogue been brighter, his characters so boldly drawn, his dramatic situations more telling; and when the curtain fell on the closing act the whole audience rose, enthusiastically acclaiming the man whose fame was now placed for ever beyond dispute. This scene was too much for Aimée's young nerves. She had watched the performance from a stage-box with one of her new friends, the Countess de Tréma; and when the audience, seeing that Paul did not answer their call, recognised his wife and turned towards her *en masse* to do her a public homage, she fell back, white and quivering in every limb, and burst into tears.

When she had recovered her composure, and was driving home with the Countess, the latter said, with emotion—

"Dear Madame d'Arley, I do not wonder that you should have been so much moved, for your influence is discernible in every line of this new play, and you have good reason to be proud."

"How so?" murmured Aimée.

"Why, it is the first play of M. d'Arley's which sends one home with a full heart of soothing sentiments. In listening to his other works one is transported, electrified, yet the philosophy is so disconsolate that the spectator goes away discouraged. But this comedy we have just seen is a beautiful idyll—the work of a happy man."

Aimée answered nothing. In the last scene, where the hero, after trying adventures, settles down into a blissful home, Paul had arranged with the scene-painter to represent

his own country-house, "The Elms," and on beholding this unexpected picture Aimée's eyes had filled with tears. Her heart overflowed now in listening to the Countess—but, once again, temples are not rebuilt in a day.

IV.

Eighteen months elapsed. During that time the d'Arlays travelled to the seaside, thence to Monaco, then went on a round of visits to the country-seats of friends. Only once Aimée snatched a hurried week to go and see her child at "The Elms;" but she was impatient to get away again. Fashion had caught her in its whirlpool, and Paul in his weariness could detect in her no symptoms of a wish to resume her old habits. When, however, they returned to Paris for the winter season, an explanation between them became necessary for pecuniary reasons.

One morning Aimée came with a long face to say she was in debt. Her housekeeping accounts would not square with her budget, and she feared she had been extravagant in millinery. Paul made good the deficit with something over, but he took the opportunity of stating his resources. The sale of his books and the performances of his plays brought him about 80,000 francs a year, which was a sufficient income for ease, but not for squandering. His remonstrances were very gently worded, but to his surprise Aimée showed irritation at them. She was not at all the same Aimée as of yore. Her fresh complexion was fading under the influence of cosmetics and late hours, and her manners had something too deliberate in them.

"What you say is very just, Paul," she remarked, plucking at her smart dress; "but we could be richer if you pleased. Why are you so idle?"

"Idle, Aimée? That is the last reproach I should have thought of hearing from you."

"Well, I assure you I am not the person who originated it," she said doggedly. "A publisher was telling me the other day that you could earn four times what you are doing now if you chose to work more. And it's a fact that I have seen you writing half a day to fill three small sheets of paper."

"Well, yes, I have been almost three years about my new novel, which is now in the publisher's hands," admitted Paul quietly. "If I wrote more I might possibly be richer, but those few sheets of paper will give us something better than money, Aimée—a fame which will, I trust, live after both of us."

"Oh fame—fame!" exclaimed Aimée, pouting; "as if you had not enough of that already. And when we are both dead what can it matter to us, pray, whether your glory is more or less? The present is what we have to think of."

Paul was shocked by this application of his theories.

"You forget our boy, Aimée," he said.

"No, it's you who forget him," ejaculated M^{de}. d'Arley crossly. "You work, thinking only of yourself, as if our boy could make an income out of your name! If you did your duty as a father, you would labour to leave him a large fortune."

This was not the first little cloud that had sprung up between the two, but it was the first that caused Paul d'Arley the acute pang of feeling that his wife's heart was no longer in unison with his own. He soon had a much greater cause of trouble, for Aimée became jealous of him.

It was perfectly natural that she should have become so,

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for there had insensibly grown up between them that estrangement which is inevitable when husband and wife have contrary tastes and follow different pursuits. Paul had not time to dance attendance on Aimée in all her mundane excursions. He was busy with his novel—that novel which he had begun in his honeymoon, and was ending under the cruel regret of a happiness which seemed to have gone for ever. He hoped much of this work, and toiled carefully at it; and then he had academical duties. He had been deputed to report on the essays and poems to which the Academy awards yearly prizes, and Government had put him on a Committee for inquiring into International Copyright. As his house was always filled with visitors and with the noisy incomings of milliners and *costumiers*, he had hired private chambers where he could work undisturbed, and here he spent most of his days. He and Aimée seldom saw each other except at dinner-time. They had separate apartments, and M^{de}. d'Arlay seldom returned from her balls and routs till the small hours, not long before the time when Paul was accustomed to get up. All this was Aimée's fault, not Paul's; but, womanlike, she came to fancy herself neglected. She would have had her husband accompany her in all her frivolous amusements, and when she found it impossible to prevail upon him so to do, she readily hearkened to the suggestions of her old evil-councillor, M^{de}. de Marœuil, that Paul secretly bestowed on other women the attentions to which she was entitled.

Nothing could have been less true, but M^{de}. de Marœuil and Aimée had become fast friends, and the former was anxious to repay the grudge which she owed Paul for the latter's violent threats. One evening at a

ministerial party, when Aimée was looking more than usually out of spirits, Mdme. de Marœuil settled beside her on an ottoman, and adroitly led up the conversation to Paul d'Arley's private doings.

"Did you not tell me, dear, that your husband had lodgings in town?"

"Yes, he goes there every morning, and says he works. We are so little together that I have no time to question him."

"I wouldn't question him—men never tell the truth; but if I were you, I would keep an eye on Mdme. de Tréma."

"Mdme. de Tréma!" ejaculated Aimée, with a sudden flush. "Why, do you think that she and Paul——; but it's impossible, she is one of my best friends."

"Reason the more. All I can say is, that I saw her brougham standing at the door where M. d'Arley's chambers are. But mind, no scenes or hysterics, dear. If M. d'Arley plays you false, you should take a leaf out of his own books; remember his theories in *La Femme d'un Sot*, and make him jealous in his turn."

Now it was a fact that Paul d'Arley had elaborated a theory very much approved by French writers, and which may be summed up in the axiom that marital affection seldom lasts long, unless the wife can promote jealousy. This beautiful lesson was not lost upon Aimée. She had a host of admirers, and in the hope that she might bring Paul to look more closely after her, she singled out one—a handsome, puppy-like officer named de Marillac—and flirted systematically with him under Paul's eyes. Unfortunately, Paul noticed nothing. He was too sensitive to ridicule to play the part of a Bluebeard, all the more so as he knew that

many eyes in society were humorously watching to see whether he feared for himself the connubial woes which he had showered on so many personages in his books. So, although M. de Marillac was continually dangle about his house, danced with Aimée at balls, called on her in her box at the opera and theatres, and disported himself generally as only an amorous Frenchman can do, Paul paid not the slightest attention to him, acting like a man who feels secure of his wife's purity, and of his own. But this did not suit Mdme. de Marœuil.

When the flirtation between Aimée and the officer had been lasting three months—and let it be admitted that it was on Aimée's part a very innocent flirtation—Madame de Marœuil sought an opportunity to warn Paul, and make him miserable. The author was often compelled to escort his wife for an hour or two to official parties, and it was on one of these occasions that Madame de Marœuil glided up to him with a smiling look of effrontery.

"Well, my old enemy, it is a long time since we have spoken to each other. Is it still your intention to gibbet me?"

"You did me so much harm, Madame," answered Paul gravely, "that no reprisals of mine would be an adequate revenge; therefore I forgive you."

"That's kindly spoken, but I have always meant better by you than you suspect, Monsieur d'Arley; and to give you a proof, I must warn you now to observe your wife. She is young and inexperienced, and I am afraid she will be compromising herself with M. de Marillac. See them both together now. Well, it's like that every evening."

Paul glanced in the direction indicated, and not a muscle

of his face betrayed that he was in the slightest degree moved. But the blow had come upon him like a bullet. For the first time the disproportion in age between his wife and himself occurred to him. She was almost a child, he was past middle age ; she had married to be free from the restraints of convent life, he had taken a wife to find rest after a laborious and distracted career. But how ludicrous might he not seem to her, with his melancholy pinings after that humdrum existence which she in her exuberant youth despised ! He turned over this new reflection in many ways ; nevertheless, he did not speak to Aimée about the officer. He waited till he had proof positive of her guilt or levity, whichever it might be, and it was not until he had observed the pair closely for another week that he resolved to remonstrate with Aimée, whom he saw, or fancied he saw, to have been merely giddy.

It happened that the day on which he took this resolution was the eve of that on which his novel, *Le Mariage d'Amour*, was to be published. In that book he had poured out his whole heart in pictures of the felicity of tranquil love in wedded life, and, with the intuition which seldom fails an author who writes conscientiously, he felt that his work was powerful enough to move a reader ; and he hoped—with what anxiety he himself only knew—that it might move Aimée. The early copies of the work had been sent by the publisher, and Paul took one of them to give his wife. Just as he was going towards her apartments a letter was brought him from St. Ricquier, announcing that his child had been seized with an attack of hooping-cough ; and this communication, though distressing, appeared to have come just in time to serve his purpose.

He found Aimée in her dressing-room, surrounded by

tulle, silks and jewels, and other extravagant preparations for a fancy-dress ball.

"I am sorry to say our boy is ill, Aimée," he said, handing her the letter, and laying the book on the table. "I think we had better both go down to St. Ricquier to-night."

"Oh, it's impossible!" she exclaimed. "There's a ball at the Austrian Ambassadress's."

This was thoughtlessly, not heartlessly said, but so unmotherly a reply filled Paul with pain and some indignation.

"Supposing our child were to die while you were dancing?" he said severely.

"Oh, please don't talk in that depressing way, Paul. Let me see what the letter says. Hooping-cough; all children have hooping-cough; and this, the nurse says, is but a slight attack. We will go to-morrow morning—the first thing, if you like. But what are you staring at?"

"Your dress—you are not going to wear that?"

"Why not, pray?"

"Because it is fit only for an actress—not an honest woman."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Aimée mockingly. "And do you know where I got the idea of that improper dress? Why, out of one of your own books! One of your heroines—a Duchess—dresses as a Naiad for a Tuileries fête, and you fill two whole pages with sarcasms against her dreary husband, who objected to see her show off her beauty becomingly!"

Paul bit his lips. At every turn in his wedded life some sin of his pen was finding him out.

"You know I never proposed my books to you as models of morality," he said, reddening. "I wrote many things

when I was young of which I am ashamed now. But there is another thing about which I wished to warn you, Aimée. People are observing that you behave rather too unguardedly with M. de Marillac."

"Aha ! so your eyes condescend to look after your wife at last !" cried Aimée, folding her arms, and gazing at him with flashes of stung pride. She was in a passion, her hair was falling over her shoulders, and she looked pretty and strange enough in her wildness. "Yes, it's true. M. de Marillac is fonder of my company than my own husband is. But before you have a right to reproach me, Paul, you must break off your relations with Madame de Tréma !"

"With Madame de Tréma ? What an absurdity, Aimée ! Will you accept my assurance that I have not spoken a hundred words with the Countess in the course of a twelve-month ?"

"You're bound to say so, of course, but others tell me differently ; and if you mean to use your liberty, Paul, I shall use mine."

"Not to go to this ball, I hope. I ask you once again, Aimée, to come with me to St. Ricquier, and to be more careful for the future in your conduct with that officer."

"And here is my answer," cried Aimée defiantly. "I *will* go to the ball, and I shall wear the dress which you put on your Duchess, and I shall dance twice with M. de Marillac, as I have promised him to do ; and if you are not satisfied, you must mend your behaviour to me, which has been unkind and unmanly to a degree."

"Very well, Aimée," said Paul, with a pale face. "I am not a tyrant, but when a woman disobeys her husband, and seems disposed to trifle with his honour, she brings punish-

ment on the man who abets her misconduct," and with these words he left the room.

Aimée was a little frightened at what she had done ; but she was secretly glad at having stirred Paul to jealousy, and flattered herself that in the journey which she truly proposed making with him on the morrow, a reconciliation might ensue between them. She cried, and if Paul had come back at that moment, she would have flung her arms round his neck and prayed his forgiveness. But he did not return ; so she set off to the ball in her Naiad's dress, danced twice with M. de Marillac as she had promised him, and talked to him with a loud forced gaiety, whilst her heart fluttered terribly as she saw her husband coldly gazing at them both. What followed need not have caused Aimée any surprise. Social conventions in France oblige a man to maintain his honour at the sword's point. Paul d'Arley glided up to M. de Marillac and beckoned him aside.

"Monsieur," he said calmly, "we are both men who can understand each other at a word. If you will name your seconds, we can settle our differences before daybreak."

The officer understood and bowed. "I must only declare to you that Madame is innocent," he added.

"I never doubted it," answered Paul quietly.

So a few hours later, and just before dawn, Paul d'Arley and the officer met in the Bois de Vincennes. The duel could not be a long one. M. de Marillac scarcely defended himself, and after a few passes Paul touched him on the chest. The seconds at sight of blood stopped the fight, and Paul, whose honour was conventionally satisfied by this scratch, returned to his house. The first thing that met him on his arrival was a telegram announcing that his child was much worse.

He sat down with a heavy sigh and reflected. Truth to say, it had not needed this announcement of his boy's illness to prompt him to the course he was now about to take ; but the sad tidings justified his resolution. Of what use or pleasure was his wedded life to him now ? He had pondered this question ever since he thought he had read in Aimée's eyes that she had ceased to love him, and the answer was this, that the sooner he was separated from her the better. He was growing old ; his wife had many years of life before her ; better leave her free to enjoy them in her own way since such was her bent. He was not moulded of the stuff to make domestic despots, and yet he loved his wife too well to bear her infidelity or discontent with resignation.

Coldly and quietly he sat down to write two letters—one to his lawyer, the other to his wife. In the first he made arrangements for settling three-fourths of his property on Aimée ; in the second he informed her that he was going back to the Elms, and that as soon as her boy was better he would take him abroad and live with him there. He did not wish Aimée to join him, he said : he preferred she should not do so for all their sakes.

But when he had written this letter, by which he cast his wife from him, what was it that made the sceptic pause before signing ? It was grey morning, but there on his desk, beaming very white in the dim light, lay the ivory crucifix which had once hung in his wife's room, and which he had kept since the day when she had discarded it.

He took it up and looked wistfully at it, then for Aimée's sake he raised it to his lips. He had just done so, when it seemed to him that a door opened, and down the passage came, with quick steps and a panting breath, a footfall

light as a child's flying for succour. It approached ; now it was nearer.

"Who's there ?" cried Paul, startled.

The door was not locked ; it opened, and Aimée stood on the threshold, hugging her husband's new book to her breast, and looking at him with eyes brimming.

"I have read it to the last line, Paul," she cried, in a broken voice, and she flung herself at his feet. "Oh, my darling, let us go back to our home. I do not think we have been either of us happy since that wretched day when I disobeyed you. But God is good, and you believe in Him as I do ; in every word of this noble book there is Christian faith ; and see, my darling, you are crying !"

THE COURTIER OF MISFORTUNE.

THE COURTIER OF MISFORTUNE:

A BONAPARTIST STORY.



I.

CAPTAIN JEAN CŒURPREUX, of the 5th Algerian Spahis, having been sent to Paris with despatches from Marshal M'Mahon to Marshal Leboeuf, was invited to the last ball given at the Tuileries by Napoleon III.

He was a man of about thirty, with a complexion the colour of leather, clipped hair that stood on end like bristles, and a full brown beard. His uniform was a light-blue loose-fitting jacket called a *dolman*, braided across the front with black silk frogs, and embroidered from the cuffs to within an inch of the shoulders with gold lace of three rows interwoven. His baggy trousers were scarlet; and he held in his hand a red kepi with the three rows of gold braid which marked his grade, the Spahis having no other head-dress than a kepi even for gala occasions. On Cœurpreux's breast glittered the ribbon and cross of the Legion of Honour, the yellow ribbon and pendant of the *médaille militaire*, which proved he had risen from the ranks, and the three campaigning medals of the Italian, Cochín-

China, and Mexican expeditions. Below these hung the white and blue ribbon and silver cross of Pius IX. and the medal of Mentana ; also three other medals, two of silver and one of gold, attached to tricoloured ribbons, and showing that the Captain had three times in the course of his career saved human lives. His muscular frame and smileless mien, the large size of the white gloves he wore, and the beard, which is the distinctive token of African service, all helped to mark a man who was no carpet soldier ; and he looked embarrassed enough in the palace saloons, where he appeared to know not a soul, and where flitted before him, alert as dragon-flies, all the dandy officers of the crack corps—the Cent-Gardes in their azure tunics and gold aiglets, the Lancers of the Guard in Austrian white, the Guides in emerald and gold, the Artillery of the Guard, the colour of whose uniforms was invisible for the mass of braiding that adorned them, and the whole host of State dignitaries, from diplomatists and senators in blue and gilding to the prefects and deputies in black and silver. Pushed into a corner by this glittering throng, fearful of treading on the skirts of the ladies who streamed by him in a sea of silk and diamonds that made his head whirl, the Captain would evidently have felt much more at home in his saddle, hunting rebel Arabs, than in this place, to which the War Minister had procured him an invitation as a conspicuous, though well-deserved, honour.*

* The *Spahis* are the native cavalry of Algeria, as the *Turcos* are the native infantry : both are mainly officered by Frenchmen ; natives being restricted from rising above the rank of lieutenant. The *dolman* is the summer-jacket as distinguished from the *pelisse*, which is worn in winter, and has Astrakan fur round the collar and cuffs. Some of the Spahi regiments used to wear scarlet jackets and light blue trousers and caps, but this has been recently altered, and the whole of the French light cavalry now wear the light-blue jacket and scarlet

Yet leaning in a corner of the noble Salle des Maréchaux, where he had been hemmed in, the Captain cast his serious blue eyes about him as if he were in search of somebody. Twelve years before this ball, and when he was but a quick-hearted boy of eighteen, he had fallen in love with a girl as beautiful as sunlight and a year less than his own age. He was thought too young to marry then; besides which, though a gentleman, he had no money to expect; so the girl's parents and his own had cut the courtship short, and told him to dismiss all ideas of it, and for ever. He protested at first, but finding resistance vain, had enlisted to try and banish a passion which could lead to nothing. Soon after, he heard that Mlle. Violette Desprès, the young lady in question, had been married to a sub-prefect, who subsequently became a full prefect—one M. de Cri, twenty years older than herself, an active placeman and a loyal. Cœurpreux had never seen her since, for most of his time had been spent in warfare; and when he came to France on furlough, it was only for a few occasional weeks, which he dutifully devoted to his family. But now, having no one to speak to him, he glanced at every face that passed, half-dreading, yet moved by a curious anxiety, to

trousers. The yellow-ribboned *médaille militaire* was instituted by Napoleon III. as a minor decoration to the Legion of Honour. It is conferred on privates and non-commissioned officers as a first step towards the other order, and carries with it a pension of £5 a year, just as the lowest grade in the Legion of Honour carries (in the army, not for civilians) £10. The *médaille militaire* is sometimes conferred on field-marshal and generals when they have attained to the highest rank, that of Grand' Croix, in the Legion of Honour; but in this case it is a manner of proclaiming that their cup of military distinction is full to the brim, and that the State can do nothing more for them. The medals with tricoloured ribbons are called *médailles de sauvetage*, and are bestowed for acts of bravery in saving life. The first two are of silver; if a third be won, it is of gold.

see the woman whom he had never forgotten nor could forget; the loves of some soldiers being strangely deep and constant. He had ascertained that day that M. de Cri was in Paris, angling for promotion after his wont, and he thought it probable that his wife might be at this court ball. Had a surgeon laid his stethoscope on Captain Cœurpreux's heart, he would have heard it beat like a boy's. So much for the man who had stared death a hundred times out of countenance, and was called the lion of his regiment!

The rooms continued to fill. Officers and dignitaries poured in faster and faster; the press of ladies became a crush; and presently, the Empress, seated under a canopy at the further end of the room, observed this officer standing by himself, so grave and unnoticed. No sovereign ever better discharged her duties of hostess than this august lady, as gentle as she was amiable, as queenly as she was fair; so she turned to the Emperor, and inquired who was yonder Spahi, so medalled and decorated. Napoleon, perhaps dreaming of the recent plebiscite, about which he had just been conversing with M. Emile Ollivier, seated in his sheen spectacles and black whiskers, referred the question to the Duke de Bassano, the Grand Chamberlain, who, of course, knowing nothing of the matter, asked Marshal Leboeuf, then standing by his side. The War Minister came forward, and in that well-modulated voice which made him the first of courtier soldiers, summed up the Captain's history in twenty words. Wounded in Italy, wounded in Mexico, Cœurpreux had conquered every step in his rise at the sword's point. His last achievement was the capture of two Arab chiefs and three villages with a troop of fifty horse—that is, at odds of something like ten to one. The Governor General of Algeria had sent him to Paris, that he might himself bear the tidings of the action in which he was

the hero, "and with your Majesty's leave," added the Marshal, "I intended submitting Captain Cœurpreux's name for promotion to the rank of *chef d'escadron*, and for advancement in the Legion of Honour." The Emperor thanked him, and the Marshal retreated.

Thereon the observant Duke de Bassano whispered to Viscount Laferrière; and this courtly Vice-Chamberlain, having a key embroidered on his coat, glided through the crowds with the expertness of a well-bred eel, and, smiling as he bowed, asked Captain Cœurpreux whether he should find him a partner. The Captain would much rather not have danced, for he had grown rusty in this science, and the offer made him redden. But he regarded a vice-chamberlain somewhat as a superior officer, and further reflected that if people were invited to balls, it was presumably to the end that they might disport themselves. Accordingly he drew up his collar, cleared his throat, and followed M. de Laferrière with an erect stride, as if he were being told off for outpost duty. The Viscount did not take him far. He hesitated a single moment which side he should turn, then made straight for a lady dressed in lilac silk and surrounded by a circle of admirers two deep. She seemed used to be worshipped, and, flirting her fan, warded off with short laughs, glances, and tosses of her pretty head, the ready compliments of her bevy, composed of attachés, subalterns of the Guard, and budding Councillors of State. But at sight of the bronzed soldier this young troop fell back, and M. de Laferrière, always smiling, said—

"Madame, allow me to introduce to you an officer who begs the honour of your acquaintance; Mdme. de Cri, Captain Cœurpreux."

It was singular that the chamberlain should have led him direct like that to the woman whom his own keen eyes had

been unable to discern—the woman whose image had shone upon him from many a beacon-fire, lit up many a cloudy night, nerved him to more brave deeds than might ever have been reckoned to his glory had he not been animated during every day and hour of twelve long years with the thoughts of his first and only love. But perhaps the image he had enshrined in his heart was that of the young girl as he had first known her, with her virginal face and simple attire, and it was this that had prevented him from recognising her as she was then—not less fair, but of completer beauty. At all events, the recognition was prompt enough now; and there was not a lineament in those features, so often seen in dreams, awake or sleeping, but seemed to him embellished by time. He faltered out a request for the next waltz, in a thick voice that struggled vainly to be distinct, and he found himself trembling as he had never done in danger or trouble since the day they had last parted.

Madame de Cri blushed, though very slightly, and remarked that it was a long time since they had met. But this was all, for Strauss's band suddenly struck up Metra's *Valse des Roses*, and Mdme. de Cri, forgetting or unheeding a promise made to another partner, stood up with Cœurpreux. He encircled her waist with his arm, she rested one of her small hands on his shoulder, casting a wondering look the while at the rows of medals on his breast, and they whirled together into the maze. But why should the bravest of men have been so poor a dancer? There is not much waltzing in Algeria, nor, had there been, was Cœurpreux the man to care for it. He had held his own once in ball-rooms along with the best; but this was when Violette Desprès used to be his partner, and he had had none since. His arm tightened

round her lithe form ; he felt her soft 'breath on his face, and his honest brain spun round like a wheel. The polished habitués of the Tuileries, accustomed to gyrate gracefully on a few yards of space, had never seen a man spin about in this fashion, and several couples skipped out of his way with alacrity. It was the best thing they could do, for the Captain crashed through the rest as if they were paper hoops, though he took care somehow that his own shoulders should be the rams, and that his partner should turn unharmed. Characteristically he had omitted to take off his sword, and ignored the drawing-room art of balancing himself in such wise that it should hang perpendicular. It was no toy either, this weapon, but a huge cavalry sabre, which knew the taste of blood, and clanked noisily as if excited, sweeping round at right angles with its owner, entangling itself in *crêpe de Chine* skirts, and ripping therein gaps a foot wide. Desolate wails sprang up on the headlong Spahi's path, and Mdme. de Cri felt that he had lost all control over his pace. "I—I think we had better stop," she murmured, growing afraid. But Cœurpreux could not have halted had he wished it. He had scattered most of the other dancers as effectually as a runaway charger might a flock of sheep ; and he only kept his balance by the force of motion as a teetotum does. Unluckily, too, there was one waltzer who had not noticed him. A Carabinier captain, six feet high and a centaur in breadth of limb, came revolving in an opposite direction. "Take care !" cried the Carabinier's partner—a countess, frail as a feather, who perceived the danger ; but Cœurpreux was already upon them. He bumped like a shell full upon the Carabinier, and the two couples reeled asunder from the shock. The Carabinier righted himself instantly, being adept ; but Cœurpreux had only just time to disengage

himself from his partner, so as not to involve her in his fall, and floundered heavily to the ground, making an unholy clatter with his scabbard, and imprinting his two spurs into the slippery flooring clean as gimlets.

Despite the Imperial presence, a titter broke out amid the muttered imprecations of those who had had their toes trodden on, and the Captain bade fair to be branded to all time as the lout who had made such a figure of himself at the Tuileries. But quick as kindness, a hand was extended to the fallen man, who grasped it not knowing whose it was, scrambled to his feet by its means, and stood crestfallen and giddy before the Emperor. It was at the Emperor's feet he had rolled; it was the Emperor who raised him.

"Commandant," said Napoleon, in the tones which those who once heard him speak could never remember without emotion, "this is the second time I have seen you fall—the first was by my side on the field of Magenta." Then turning to Madame de Cri, while the laughers around lapsed silent and converged their gaze with surprise on the quivering soldier: "Madame, a man may be pardoned for missing his footing in a ball-room, who has kept it so often and so well in posts of danger. But Commandant Cœurpreux will owe you a *revanche*, and as he belongs from this day to my regiment of Guides, he will have many opportunities of proving to you in this very room that a gallant heart can always retrieve ill-fortune."

A general picked up and restored to the new Commandant a medal of his that he had dropped; and Cœurpreux bent low without a word before his Sovereign. What indeed could he have said? To save a man from ridicule and exalt him to be the admiration of a thousand people who were disposed to laugh him to scorn, is not a service to be repaid by words; and Cœurpreux felt simply too much

moved to speak. The crowds parted in two respectful rows to right and left of him, as he gave his arm to Madame de Cri, and flattering murmurs buzzed their music in his ears, making of his progress a triumphal march. The ladies forgave him for their torn skirts, and eyed him with complacency; the men bore no rancour for their grazed elbows or bruised feet; and the Carabinier captain, who had been inclined to resent his clumsiness with a scowl, offered him a smirking apology, now that Cœurpreux was promoted over his head and was a man to be courted among men. And Madame de Cri, what did she say or do? As her partner conducted her to her place, he was aware of an arm trembling upon his; and when she was seated and he ventured a few words, not very firm or coherent, in apology for his mishap, it did not escape him that her agitation exceeded his own. It is perhaps not a bad world where the trials of twelve years can be effaced by a moment's joy: for Cœurpreux felt he would have suffered twelve years more to be repaid at the end with another such glance as Violette cast upon him when she muttered: "I had not heard of your dangers and triumphs; I hope you will come and tell me about them yourself."

"Yes, we most sincerely hope Commandant Cœurpreux will do us the pleasure to call," intervened a personage who hurried up, looking like a yellow grasshopper. He had not much hair, but a riband round his neck, and an open mouth that seemed to dribble words as if it had a leak in it. "We shall always be delighted to see you, Commandant. We are staying at the Grand Hôtel pending my transfer to a livelier prefecture, I trust, than that which I now hold. But I am come with orders from her Majesty. The Empress desires that you shall be a guest at her

supper-table, in order that she may pin the officer cross of our Order to your coat with her own hand."

The glow had faded from Violette's cheek, and she had turned slightly pale at the arrival of this intruder.

"Commandant," she said in an abashed voice, "my husband—M. de Cri."

II.

M. de Cri belonged to a family who had housed and fed themselves out of the public taxes ever since the great Revolution, and perhaps before it, which proves once again that revolutions and reforms are synonymous. Whatever befel kings, the family of De Cri remained where they were, and they were always in first-rate places; so that now and then, when a Frenchman who had helped to overturn a throne came to a public office and found a De Cri there as if nothing had happened, he was inclined to marvel whether his revolution had been of much use; which marvel was well grounded. The Cris were of course cousins by marriage and sworn brothers in all else to the great house of Jobus, who also clung to their posts through all wind and weather. If it had been computed what sums in gold those two valuable tribes had sucked out of the Treasury since they had first put their lips to the national udder, one would have reached a total which could have sufficed to gild every house-top, window-sill, and rain-pipe in France, to say nothing of all the mile-stones from Havre to Marseilles; and if it had been reckoned what they had done for their country in return for these payments, a mass of written paper might have been accumulated sufficient to light the kitchen-fires of Europe for a score of years and the cigars of Christendom to all eternity. As it was, the buttermen, tobacconists, and grocers of France wrapped

all their wares in printed forms filled up by members of the Cri and Jobus connections, so that it cannot be contended these families were either useless or unprofitable in their generation. They fared plenteously, and, when their individual constitutions would admit of it, were sleek. It did not do to offend them, for they were naturally convinced that all things in France were theirs, and they could make their displeasure felt as effectively as a swarm of drones can. As there was not a coat upon a Cri or Jobus, back but had been paid for by the public, they missed no occasion of declaring how greatly the public were beholden to them. And it is fair to add that if the public occasionally evinced a different opinion, there was no want of moralists who asserted that we live in a thankless age.*

M. Nepos Lémargeux Desfonds de Cri, Violette Desprès' husband, had been allotted his share in the budget at an early age. His father holding a post of emolument, it had been frankly conceded that his son was entitled to do the same ; and, further, that this post ought to be a lucrative one, for, as we all know, the great Revolution abolished hereditary privileges. So young de Cri got a sub-prefectship, just as his father before him had obtained one because his father had enjoyed such a sinecure when sub-prefectships were first invented. Young de Cri was not pleased with his first appointment, because there was not enough pay to it, and, as a general rule, M. de Cri never was pleased, nor, at heart, were the different Ministers who promoted him, for there was not one of them but felt that, if half the Mint should be poured into M. de Cri's cash-bag, such a reward would not be in excess of that faithful servant's deserts. Whenever a Home Minister came to

* For additional particulars as to the Jobus influence, see *Le Ministre malgré lui* (Cornhill Magazine, April 1872).

grief, one of the first trains following the catastrophe brought M. de Cri into Paris; and another train soon after bore him out of the capital, with a patent of promotion signed and sealed in his coat-pocket. He visited the metropolis as ordinary folk do a kitchen-garden—to pick fruit there; and in the course of his official changes had been moved about the land like a chessman, displacing in his onward march many a humble pawn, who, being either inoffensive, or hard-working, or content with his lot, was naturally deprived of his emoluments on the first convenient opportunity. M. de Cri was honoured with the esteem and confidence of all out of whom he had ever cozened favour from the Emperor in person down to the lowest clerk in the Home Office, presumably some relative of his own. M. Rouher knew him, so did M. de Persigny; M. de Lavalette accounted him a blameless functionary, and M. Chevandier de Valdrôme was full of his praises. If M. Conti, his Majesty's Secretary, had been asked to mention an indispensable official, he would have named M. de Cri; and if M. Emile Ollivier had been sounded as to who was the fitting man to be entrusted with a post involving a substantial receipt of public monies, he would have pronounced M. de Cri to be that fitting man beyond all doubt. Nor was the reason of this far to seek, for M. de Cri had followed throughout his life a rule which cannot be too universally commended:—he had never left to another the task of blowing his own trumpet. His own trumpet was an instrument he carried about with him, always ready for use, and he never allowed it to grow rusty. If men would but bugle their merits as M. de Cri did, pitching his notes now loud, now with soft melodiousness, according to the mood of his listener, this earth would offer a concert of sweet sounds indeed.

Now a fortnight or so after the ball at the Tuileries, M. de Cri returned to his lodgings at the Grand Hôtel, elate at having obtained his promotion from a second to a first class prefectship, but pensive in another respect—which other respect was Commandant Cœurpreux. The fact is, when a man like Cœurpreux, having neither kith nor kin in a Government office, or indeed anything at all to recommend him, save his own bravery, is suddenly raised to a brilliant post by an act of sovereign prerogative, he upsets a whole series of thoughtful plans, devised for the good of the world by the real masters of the State, who are the Government underlings, and he jostles out of the way Jobuses, Cris, and their hangers-on without number. It is true that by popular fiction an Emperor is supposed to rule and dispense honours; but this is purely a fiction, for it is the Cris and Jobuses who rule; it is they who dispense honours, and they render unto each man according to his deserts, after laws of their own as immutable as those that went to work on Daniel. Thus, for a man like Cœurpreux there is no stint of dignities, but they must be of the proper sort that fit him. Let him be advanced, by all means, and sent into marching regiments to fight Arabs, and, if Heaven so wills it, be knocked on the head. But the leading commands in crack regiments like the Guides, and, indeed, all snug military, as all civil berths generally, where there is no work to be done and plenty of plums to be gathered, these are the rightful appanages of the Cris and Jobuses, and ought on no account to be interfered with. Captain de Cri-Hurlant had been confidently awaiting the commandantship which Cœurpreux had got, a Lieutenant Jobus had been expecting Cri-Hurlant's vacancy, and a Sub-Lieutenant Jobus-Cri had made perfectly sure of stepping into the shoes which Lieutenant Jobus abandoned. These were

combinations which ought not to have been roughly set aside, the less so, as this new commandant was not one of your decent speakers, who keep a civil tongue between their teeth, and have the grace to attribute to the Jobuses and Cris whatever good-luck may befall them with or without the assistance of these worthies. He was a grumbler, after the manner of the Algerian officers, whose allowance is that which the monkey got. He thought there were abuses at the War Office, and used to say so in Africa ; he would probably discover there were abuses in the Guides, and bawl the fact in the Emperor's hearing. This was altogether undesirable—in fact, quite obnoxious to contemplate ; and when M. Nepos Lémargeux Desfonds de Cri went to get his letter of appointment at the Home Office, he was told by his relatives there how greatly agitated and ruffled were the feelings of the War-Office Jobuses and Cris. They had deferred making out Cœurpreux's commission, in the hope that his Majesty might reconsider his promise, and post the Commandant to active service again ; and to this end they had spared no pains to impress upon his Majesty that Cœurpreux was a disaffected sort of subject, a reformer, a man who disapproved of guard regiments, and who had even at sundry times expressed himself in no becoming terms of the Imperial dynasty. Unfortunately, Napoleon had a weakness for keeping the promises he made ; and as the Jobuses and Cris were aware (they are somehow aware of everything) that Mdme. de Cri, *née* Desprès, had been formerly acquainted with Cœurpreux, they besought Prefect de Cri that Madame might use her influence on the Commandant, so that he might voluntarily forego his squadron in the Guides, and petition of his own accord to be sent warring again. In this case there would be a commandantship in Cochin-China that would suit him

admirably. The Cochinchinese were not yet subdued, and if Cœurpreux survived marsh fevers, dysentery, and poisoned arrows, he might get his colonelcy almost as soon as by staying in Europe.

So when M. de Cri entered his drawing-room, which was a smart one on the first floor, looking out on to the Place de l'Opera, he said to his wife, who had been dividing her forenoon equally between a novel of M. Arsène Housaye and a fashion-book from Worth's—

"My dear, has that Commandant Cœurpreux called since the other night?"

"Yes, twice;" and Violette bent over one of Mr. Worth's notions of a plain morning dress—fifty guineas without the trimming.

"Were you alone with him?"

Violette cast a puzzled look at her husband, and slightly coloured—"No; there were several visitors both times."

M. de Cri seemed disappointed, and took up his position next the mantel-shelf, with his coat-tails lifted under his arms, and his hands in his trousers' pockets—a graceful and well-known attitude.

"My dear, I have the utmost confidence in your diplomatic powers, and I want you to try them on this kind of petted savage, who I believe was attached to you in bygone times. In a moment of heedless generosity, the Emperor conferred on him a post far too good for such a man as he. It leads to equerryships and all sorts of things. We must get him to drop it." And M. de Cri explained to his wife the little machination on which all the Jobuses and Cris had set their patriotic wits and their hopes.

Violette listened in silence at first, whilst she was recovering from the start which her husband's question had caused

her; but when she perceived the drift of M. de Cri's request, an indignant flush mounted to her face. She was a frivolous lady, as a woman cannot well help being who is mated to a gentleman like M. de Cri. Her married life had been made up of dressing and amusement, chastened by a little fashionable devotion in Passion Week; and what hours she could spare between the calls of society and those of her toilet-table she mostly passed in blushing over the novels of M. Houssaye, or in shedding a few refreshing tears over those of M. Octave Feuillet. But at sight of Jean Cœurpreux's honest features, she had felt all that was good in her young life revive, as flowers shrunk by rain may do at the first return of sun-warmth. He had breathed to her not a word that her husband might not have heard; but who is the woman that needs to be told of what is in a man's heart? Since she had seen Cœurpreux come back to her after twelve years' absence, with the unalterable look he had worn in bidding her good-bye, she had thought of him alone, more perhaps than was quite safe.

"Do you mean to say," she exclaimed slowly, but with a hot flush, "that you wish M. Cœurpreux to renounce his post, in order that the Emperor may suspect him of ingratitude, and let him be sent out of France again?"

"Yes; that is exactly it," answered M. de Cri briskly, and quite unobservant of the flush. "If this Spahi seems to make light of his appointment to the Guides, the Emperor will think the man has some crotchet about household brigades, and offer no impediment to his being posted elsewhere. Then Cri-Hurlant will get the squadron."

"I never heard such an odious thing in my life," ejaculated Violette, almost crying from humiliation. "Why, M. Cœurpreux is the soul of courage and loyalty, and you wish to damage him in favour of a man who has never done

anything but lead quadrilles at court balls—a puppy whom I can never look at with common patience.”

M. de Cri opened his mouth, and stared with a panic of astonishment.

“You appear to forget Cri-Hurlant is my cousin!”

“And what of that?” retorted Violette, flashing scorn from her eyes; “he is not worthy to be the groom of the man to whom you grudge this poor little piece of Imperial bounty, because he appears to be friendless! Oh, it is cruel and shameful, and I should esteem myself the lowest of women if I were to do what you have asked me.”

M. de Cri’s physiognomy changed to an ashen colour that was by no means picturesque. He let fall his coat-tails, drew his hands from his pockets, and rubbed his fingers together quietly.

“I beg to observe that I was this morning appointed Prefect of the Haute-Seine, and there is no reason whatever why, if I play my cards well, I should not soon be in the Senate, and perhaps the Cabinet. My relations have always been kind to me, and I am bound to stand by them, especially as in this instance Cri-Hurlant is only waiting for his squadron in the Guides to make a rich marriage. Besides” (and here M. de Cri drew himself up with a pompousness that was pretty droll), “I believe this man Cœurpreux would be dangerous to the Emperor’s service. He is an innovator, perhaps a republican in disguise. He carps at the Government—such persons have been known to desert to the rabble in times of rebellion.”

“Ah! this is too much!” cried Violette, trembling from head to foot, and with one of those stinging laughs with which women can goad a husband to fury. “Why, I have been informed you were a republican yourself when you wished to retain a post under the republic, and a

royalist when you were first made a sub-prefect by Louis Philippe."

M. de Cri broke out with something very like an oath, and turned a flaming visage upon his wife.

"I am not here to be taunted by you as to any passage in my life, nor to hear your judgment on it. You will do as I tell you, or else," added he with significant emphasis, "I shall conclude you have reasons for shielding this soldier which no honest woman would care to avow."

What answer M. de Cri might have received to this chivalrous thrust there is no saying, but perhaps it was well for him that at this juncture a waiter knocked at the door and came in announcing "Commandant Cœurpreux."

The prefect's countenance underwent a rapid transformation, and he rushed forward to receive his visitor with his usual gush of affability and garrulousness. "How do you do, my dear Commandant? delighted to see you! What a difference you must find between our climate and the delicious summers of Africa! I declare it looks as if it were going to rain again. But I am afraid I must leave you, having an appointment at the Home Office. Mdme. de Masseline is going to call for Mdme. de Cri by and by, to take her to the Picture Exhibition, and I daresay you will fill my place, and act as their cavalier. The ladies could not be in better hands." He wrung Cœurpreux's fingers with most affectionate cordiality, sketched a smile to his wife, and was gone. Cœurpreux and Violette were alone.

The Commandant was changed in appearance since the ball. He shone in civilian's dress, and had shaved off his beard, wearing now only the waxed moustache and *impériale* of the Guard. In his button-hole was a rosette instead of a plain ribbon, and though it would have been impossible not to recognise him for a soldier by his drilled gait and

the military cut of his clothes, he was got up with that careful neatness and good taste which marks a French gentleman of the best school.

He took a seat beside the sofa on which Violette sat, and noticed that she was nearly overcome with emotion. A burning flush overspread her features, and her manners were almost hysterical.

"Tell me, Commandant," she said, beginning the conversation feverishly, "are you gazetted yet?"

"No, I am still waiting."

"And why, since the Emperor promised you your appointment before the whole court?"

Cœurpreux smiled gently and gave a true French shrug.

"The Emperor reigns, but does not rule. There are formalities to be accomplished, papers to be signed, and I believe there are moments when a signature costs a War Office clerk as much as if it were wrung from him with a thumbscrew. I am not a favourite with those gentlemen; and if they could find some impediment to my getting on in the world, they would sleep a happy night all round."

Violette put her lace handkerchief to her mouth and bit it distractedly in a torment of hesitation.

"Do not be offended at what I am going to ask you," she faltered. "Is it true that you are a Republican?"

The officer recoiled and turned red as if he had been accused of a dishonourable action.

"Since I enlisted to drive away a sorrow which I then thought curable," he said, in a grave tone of pain, "I have had one benefactor, whose name has been connected with every rise that has made me what I am. When my first epaulette was given me, it was in the Emperor's name; when I received the cross of honour for services far too slight to deserve such a dignity, I was told that the Em-

peror had with his own hand written my nomination on the margin of the despatch in which my unworthy claims were submitted to him. The other night, when my awkwardness was nearly covering me with well-merited ridicule, you saw how he saved me, and you heard what he said. It would be trivial to declare I would die for the Emperor—that is no more than my duty; but if by going barefooted and hungry I could save him a pang, if by sacrificing all I have now and all my prospects to come I could relieve him from an annoyance, however slight, I would do it, and deem myself happy at being able to acknowledge a debt which is more than I can ever pay.”

Violette was crying.

“Then you have enemies,” she sobbed—“false and heartless enemies, who are maligning you.” She gave way during a few minutes to a paroxysm of grief, which shook her whole frame, and which she was utterly unable to repress. Cœurpreux sat by, amazed and silent, whilst beads of perspiration pearly on his forehead, and his eyes fastened, with an expression of anxiety impossible to render, on the woman who was all in all to him, and whose uncontrollable anguish was occasioned solely by fears for his sake. He rose noiselessly, sank on one knee, and drew one of her hands within his.

“Violette, thank you for those tears,” he murmured, with deep feeling. “Do you not think I bless my enemies with all my might for this unexpected happiness they have given me?”

Violette disengaged her hand from his, and struggled pitifully with herself for a moment.

“You must go, Jean,” she wailed in alarm, and shutting out the sight of him with her hands. “I thought you would forget me—and oh! if I could have foreseen this

day ! but it is too late—misfortune hangs over us, and you must go away. Do not face the malice of these men ; they would find means to break your heart, for I know of what things they are capable ; and besides, if you remained near the court, we might see each other, and this cannot—this must not be. No, you must go away far—not abroad, where you would be in battles and danger again ; but there must be regiments in France, to which you might be sent without exciting any one's jealousy. But you must leave me, for you see I am weak, and" . . . Sobs choked her utterance again, and she averted her head from him, burying it on a pillow and convulsed in her agony.

"I ask you so little, Violette, and to see you occasionally would be such a gladness," muttered Cœurpreux in a broken voice, standing over her.

"No, no !" and here she rose with an effort, clasped her hands, and with streaming eyes implored him : "Save me from myself, Jean, I entreat you—on your honour."

"Good-bye, then," he faltered with a great throb at his heart, and he drew her to him rapidly, kissed her, and fled.

But he did not go to the War Office to renounce his commission to the 2nd Guides, for that afternoon it was too late, and by the time he went next day some kind friends had saved him all trouble on that head. The court were at St. Cloud, and in the evening one of those beings whose privilege it is to come quite near to the ear of royalty—and what a noble use they make of that privilege !—remarked that his Majesty was never tired of combating his detractors with good gifts. Napoleon inquired what detractors ; and the Empress, who was examining with Princess Metternich an album of which the Prince Im-

perial turned the leaves, raised her soft eyes anxiously, wondering, maybe, when the tongues of detractors would tire. The Being then explained that M. Cœurpreux, who would soon have the honour of commanding three troops of their Majesties' body-guards, was a curious sort of man, most brave, and all that, but wrong-headed, a *grognard* of the politico-military species—rather perilous, and with acid enough in him to turn the whole 2nd Regiment of Guides sour. For instance, whilst quartered at Constantine two years ago, he used to take in the *Lanterne*, and read it aloud after dinner to his brother officers, dilating much as he went on the humour of M. Rochefort; whereat Napoleon frowned, for M. Rochefort was just then cooling his humour in prison, and was no very welcome topic at court evenings. The Being proceeded to state that the projected appointment of M. Cœurpreux had excited great admiration on all sides, as illustrating once again the inexhaustible benevolence of his Majesty, but that, singularly enough, the Commandant himself was the only man who seemed nowise enchanted by it. He had a mean opinion of Guard regiments, laughed at them, and thought the Spahis much better. He had said, sneering, that with a troop of mounted negroes he would put the entire Cavalry of the Guard to flight, and dispose of the Infantry afterwards. There was no question, however, that he was brave to rashness; that is, to a fault.

Now a sovereign may well like to reward valour, and yet be excused for not desiring to have about him a man who would turn his pet regiment sour: so the Emperor said calmly—

“I thought to do Commandant Cœurpreux a kindness by putting him in the Guides; but if he prefer some other corps, let him have his way.” And at this the Empress,

who had lost interest in the album, heaved a little sigh of relief, as though to say, "Only fancy, if this wrong-headed Commandant had come and arrested us all at early morning, like the officer on guard did poor Prince Couza at Bucharest!" or as a lady of humble sphere might have expressed it, "What an escape we have had of all being murdered in our beds!"

However, the Emperor, who perhaps recalled Cœurpreux's manly face, and the warm things that had been written of him by Marshal M'Mahon, expressed the wish that the Commandant should be well provided for, and took the same occasion to ask who would get this post in the Guides which M. Cœurpreux disdained? The Being deferentially submitted that Captain de Cri-Hurlant was a chivalrous warrior, and deeply devoted to their Imperial Majesties, and he indicated by a glance the warrior in question, who was courageously revolving a stereoscope for the two Mesdemoiselles d'Albe, the Empress's graceful nieces. The Emperor said nothing, but before another day had passed there was balm for the whole tribe of the Jobuses and the Cris: Captain de Cri-Hurlant had the squadron, Lieutenant Jobus got the captaincy, Sub-Lieutenant Jobus-Cri walked into the lieutenantship, and a Jobus-Hurlant, just out of St. Cyr, gained possession of the cornetcy—whereupon the world set to going round again, as if it had not been temporarily, and most infelicitously, put out of course.

As for Cœurpreux, he presented himself at the War Office in uniform on the day following his visit to Violette, and after waiting no more than an hour and a quarter in an ante-room, was admitted to the presence of a Jobus clerk, permanent, of course, and irresponsible. There he learned all that was good for him to know; namely, that he

was not to have the commission he had been promised ; but the Jobus-clerk added blandly, that he would get something else some day or other, when his Excellency the Minister should have time to think about him. This high and mighty clerk, who may have stood five feet three allowing his boots to count, was condescending enough to patronise such poor folk as this Cœurpreux, who had done nothing but help win half-a-hundred battles or so, and he loftily waved his paw to him in token that he might depart.

But Cœurpreux, who had come to forego the Imperial favour *motu proprio*, felt not a little hurt that it should be withdrawn from him in this unceremonious style, and so exclaimed drily enough—

“I should like to know whether the Emperor gave you orders to break his word for him in that fashion. However, I don’t lay on the Emperor’s shoulders the dirty tricks that are done in his name ; for if I did, there might come from this office alone mud enough to choke the Seine up.”

“Sir !” gasped the little Jobus-clerk, rising to his full height and frowning at his insulter with all the dignity of a flea on a perch browbeating a lion with muzzle on—“Sir !” but he could find nothing else to say, for Cœurpreux eyed him coolly, and as duelling is not extinct in France, the small Jobus doubtless reflected that if he were tweaked by the nose, he might get run through next daybreak into the bargain. Yet it seemed very monstrous to this clerk that a miserable officer should dare to bandy words with him thus shamelessly.

“I was going to say,” continued Cœurpreux, drawing a large envelope from the breast of his jacket, “that I intended declining the honour which his Majesty wished to

bestow, and here is a letter which I had written to beg the Emperor to employ me on active service again. I have got my promotion, for his Majesty called me Commandant, and not all the clerks in Paris can take that from me, or shall. But I only ask to go back to my regiment, even if I take simple brevet rank of commandant, and I daresay you gentlemen will not object to that much. Please see that my letter reaches the Emperor, or else there'll be a row. Good-morning."

The Jobus-clerk grumbled something and thanked Heaven he was well rid of such a brute. Cœurpreux went and lunched at the general rendezvous of officers, the Café du Helder on the Boulevard des Italiens; and as, by sitting at one of the tables outside, he could descry the Grand Hôtel some hundred yards to the left, he did so when his frugal lunch was over, and remained smoking all the afternoon, watching if haply Violette might pass by in her barouche and afford him one passing glimpse of her. But she did not pass, either that day or the next, or on any of the twenty days more during which the War-Office clerks kept Cœurpreux rapping his heels on the asphalte of Paris. Cœurpreux chafed and growled, and vented his fury in much imprudent talk among brother officers at the Helder, vowing that the administration of the army had grown rotten up to the hilt, as France would find if she ever ran tilt against a less Jobus-ridden Power. As armies are never quite devoid of high-souled officers anxious to curry favour with the Jobus-clerks, these sayings were faithfully reported to the War Office, and did Cœurpreux all the good one may imagine. It became an urgent question of consigning him to Cochinchina without delay, of treating him to the governorship of that delightful settlement of convicts and

vomito negro, Cayenne, "where," remarked the clerks humorously, "he would find himself in congenial company." But Violette, who watched over Cœurpreux in secret, frustrated these designs, and accosted Marshal Lebœuf, at a party one night, with a tale so worded as to touch him. Marshal Lebœuf, who has borne and will bear to all time the burden of the sins which his underlings committed—and of which they of course promptly washed their hands—was no fool, but a gallant soldier, as can witness his management of the artillery at Solferino. His fault was excessive good-nature, which made him loth to tackle the Jobuses and Cris as peremptorily as his predecessor Marshal Niel had done; he had let them get the upper hand of him, and walked in dread of them. Wherefore, hearing the wife of M. de Cri denounce the doings of the potent league of which her husband was so honoured a member, he marvelled slightly, but ended by smiling, as a Frenchman will do when a pretty woman pleads the cause of a soldier at once brave and handsome. He promised to see into the matter; and next day, to the disgust of the Jobuses, who had not been so much as consulted, Cœurpreux received his commission to a full commandantship in that doughty regiment the 25th Cuirassiers, with orders to join as soon as he should have gone to Algeria to fetch his traps and carry despatches to Marshal M'Mahon. The Duke of Magenta laughed in his quiet way when he heard from Cœurpreux, at a private dinner, what things this worthy fellow had endured at the hands of the clerks. He for his own part knew the Jobuses well. Had they not poisoned the Emperor's mind against him, by reminding his Majesty on every occasion that Marshal M'Mahon had voted against the Government Bill of Public Safety in the

Senate, was a suspicious subject, and enjoyed a dangerous ascendancy over the army? This had prevented the victor of Magenta from ever becoming War Minister, and his vice-royalty in Algeria was virtually an exile. "My poor Cœurpreux," said he, smiling, "you do not understand the secret of getting on in life. Here is Marshal Lebœuf, who writes to me privately that you have been wagging that honest tongue of yours too freely, and he tells me to give you a friendly hint that it won't do." "But, Marshal, I have never breathed a word against the Emperor," protested Cœurpreux. "No," said the Duke, "though perhaps it would have been safer if you had, for the Emperor forgives; but the clerks are more powerful than the Emperor, and they don't forgive. You had best make your peace with them, believe me, for they are stronger than all of us put together;" and the Marshal, who liked soldiers of Cœurpreux's mould, gave him a cigar and went out on the balcony of the Government House to smoke with him and talk about Paris.

Exactly a month after this dialogue, Commandant Cœurpreux, who was installed in his new garrison, received orders along with the rest of the 25th Cuirassiers to go and join Marshal M'Mahon's army on the Rhine, for war had been declared by France against Germany.

III.

On the 4th September, 1870, towards one o'clock in the afternoon, an officer in a cuirassier uniform got out of a train on the platform of the Northern Station, jumped into the first cab he could find—it happened to be an open one—and told the coachman, in a fevered voice, to drive him

to the Tuileries. His uniform was soiled and torn ; there was mud on his boots up to the knees; his head was bound up in bandages clotted with blood, and his haggard face bore a week's unshaved beard. A mob pressing outside the station for news recognised him for an officer, no doubt from Sedan, and gave him a ringing cheer, but he bent his head and made no response. The city bore nothing of the mourning aspect he had expected. The *cafés* were full and noisy. Bands of workmen, who ought to have been at drill, strolled by rows of twenty arm-in-arm along the carriage-ways, bawling vinously, "*Vive la République ! Vive Trochu ! A bas Badinguet !*" Policemen were invisible. Women and peasants pushing hand-carts laden with furniture before them streamed in from the country districts round Paris, and seemed to be on the look-out for lodgings. Newspapers found a brisk sale, boys screamed the *Marseillaise*, and tradesmen, with scared faces, were climbing ladders to unhook Imperial escutcheons, and paint out the words, "*Purveyor to their Majesties,*" in which but a day ago they had gloried.

The cab drove quickly, but at the bottom of the Rue de Valois had to stop, for the Place du Palais Royal was full of people. The cuirassier got out, paid the driver, and endeavoured to hurry unobserved through the crowd, which was rather a curious than an excited one. He did somehow force himself a passage through the mobs surging towards the Hôtel de Ville on the one hand, towards the Tuileries Gardens on the other ; and when he reached the sentry mounting guard somewhat nervously at the Carousel gate, opened his cloak to show the despatch-bag slung over his tunic, and was allowed to pass in without question. The immense yard, adorned with a triumphal

arch reared to celebrate past victories over a people now conquerors in their turn, was almost deserted ; but at intervals, men, for the most part in civilian dress, shuffled panic-stricken across the yard and entered the palace. The cuirassier followed them, climbed the staircase, where no usher or footman stood to ask intruders their business, brushed past a terrified group of ladies, who were coming down the stairs with travelling-bags in their hands, and asked for the aide-de-camp on duty. He was directed to go down a passage to the right ; did so, and remitted his despatch-bag. Then with the receipt crushed between his fingers, wandered about unheeded amid startled figures running or rushing down the corridors, till he found himself in the room where some three months before he had received a kindness from an Emperor, then in the full pomp and grandeur of his power.

All the last friends of the fallen court were there, but not so much high dignitaries—for these took care of themselves—nor Jobuses—they are never to be seen in such moments—as younger men and modest functionaries, whose fealty had not perhaps been always appreciated in brighter days, but came out true and pure now in this hour of adversity. The appearance of the officer and his travel-stained clothes caused a sensation, and a move was made towards him. A few recognised him despite his bandage, which, now his kepi was off, gave him the look of being turbaned, and they said, “It’s Colonel Cœurpreux, who rode next M’Mahon in the charge of the cuirassiers at Reischaffen, and was promoted on the field.” They gathered round him eagerly, and inquired of him if he had news :

“You were at Sedan, Colonel ; is all really lost ?” and it was a gloomy thing to hear these men ask this about a country and a sovereign they loved.

"Yes, all's lost," groaned Cœurpreux, "but the honour of the Emperor, who has been betrayed, and that of our War Office, who had no honour to lose."

"How did the Emperor bear it?"

"Simply, like a man. He was never greater than when he drove through the town with an expression on his face that might have touched the very stones, and gave up his sword to save his army. People will say here that he should have died, but anybody has the courage to die. The courage is to live, and to endure all this"—and he pointed with his hand to the Tuileries Gardens, at the end of which a mob was to be seen approaching with gesticulations and waving of flags.

Count Palikao, the Prime Minister, passed rapidly through the room, and disappeared into a chamber where the Empress was known to be; and all gathered round the windows. The mob were drawing nearer, and the quays could be seen covered with people who had been to the Corps Législatif, where M. Gambetta had been haranguing the multitude, and exhorting it to clamour for the Emperor's deposition. Chevalier Nigra, the Italian Ambassador, entered with a breezy aspect as if nothing particular were happening, and a chaplain asked him if there were any hope. "Hope of what?" answered M. Nigra, cheerfully, and went the way of M. de Palikao, but with a careless, swinging stride, for all this was no great concern of his. Cœurpreux leaned in a window-recess moaning, but as he perceived that the mob swelled and advanced each second like a rising tide, he drew a revolver, and casting a keen look about him, said—

"Gentlemen, I hope we are all prepared to defend the Empress against yonder curs?"

A silence replied to this question, and one young man

alone stepped out with a revolver. The rest had come unarmed. They were faithful to the point of risking death, but not of courting it. Cœurpreux glanced from one to another, as if he could not believe his eyes. Then a great sob escaped him, and he turned with brimming eyes to watch the sea which advanced slowly, and the thin line of soldiers in the private garden below, who would be the only dyke against it. "Our place is with those men there," he said to the young man who was armed; "let us go to them; we shall at least die in good company."

A few of the bystanders winced—in particular, two priests, who would not have grudged their blood, though it was not their duty to shed any. Several moved to follow Cœurpreux; but at this moment a door was opened, and the Empress appeared with one of her ladies-in-waiting, Count Palikao, an aide-de camp, and one or two other advisers. She was dressed in black, was calm and resigned, and, hearing that firearms had been exhibited, sent to request as a last favour to her that no resistance should be offered. Her Majesty was then told that one of the gentlemen who wished to defend her was Colonel Cœurpreux, and she prayed her aide-de-camp to summon him. M. Cœurpreux arrived with the tears still welling over his eyes—though it was no fault of his, for he struggled hard enough to keep them in; and possibly as he stood before her, with his head bowed and his knees shaking, the Empress recognised the man who had been painted to her by the Jobuses and Cris as a factious subject.

"Colonel, you found your way through the enemy's lines to bring me a letter from the Emperor," she said, in a soft, sad voice. "I thank you, and wish it were still in my power to reward your devotion."

"Madam," murmured Cœurpreux, in words of which each syllable sprang vibrating from his heart, "you can give me the only reward I covet by allowing me to lay down my life for you."

"No, not a drop of French blood must be shed for me," she answered quietly; "nor would I forgive myself for depriving France of a life like yours, Colonel, at a time when brave men are more than ever needed. Still, again I thank you." And she extended her hand to him with a grateful smile. He dropped on one knee, and pressed it to his lips reverentially.

At this juncture Prince Metternich and M. de Lesseps approached quickly. They spoke a few words, but their looks said more than they uttered. The Empress glanced towards the gardens, where the crowd had by this time become a host, whose shouts broke loud and imperatively through the stillness of this room filled with expectant courtiers. Her lips quivered faintly for a single instant, and the pallor of her face deepened just enough to show that it was pain, not fear, she felt. Then she turned with queenly self-possession, and made to the loyal few who remained her grandest curtsey—that of the state galas now gone and forgotten amidst other ruins. This was the signal that all was over. The Empire had fallen; the Empress retired, and the friends of the eleventh hour were free to go and see to themselves, their goods and their chattels. They scampered downstairs, putting their best feet foremost, and the palace became a show to the rabble, who presently flooded in, their mouths agape, and filled it from floor to attic with their savoury majesty.

Cœurpreux had heard a few of the words which Prince Metternich had let fall, and he went and stood near the gate of the Louvre opposite the Church of St. Germain

l'Auxerrois, where a cab was waiting. In a few minutes the veiled forms of two ladies glided out, and Cœurpreux, though he could not be seen behind the angle where he had sheltered himself, bared his head as they passed. He watched to see that no one recognised or molested the lady whom M. de Lesseps handed into the fly, and his gaze followed this vehicle as it turned and disappeared with its blinds down, and the Italian ambassador on the box beside the coachman. It would have fared ill, then, with any partisan of equality who should have stood in the horse's way or offered a rude word to the Empress, whom this unconscious hack was drawing into exile, for Cœurpreux was in that mind when to have faced a whole horde of the populace with his solitary sword and revolver, and to have bitterly flung in their teeth their base treason and cowardice, would have been a grim pleasure. But nobody afforded him that satisfaction. The fly, jogging along unremarked, mingled with other flies ; and Cœurpreux, emerging from his concealment, went with an aching heart about business of his own. As he strode down the Rue de Rivoli, not caring much whom he elbowed, it was twenty minutes past three, and the tricolour flag which had been waving eighteen years on the late Imperial palace was hauled down. Two *petit-crevés*, or swells of the small French sort, watched this historical occurrence from a corner of the Place des Pyramides, and one, removing his eyeglass the better to see, said to the other : " There go twenty years of jollity." " Yes," sighed the other, " and, only to think I used to be fool enough to vote for the opposition just for the fun of the thing." The pair of noble hearts sighed, and went their ways. Cœurpreux shrugged his shoulders, and followed.

One of the most comforting features of French revolutions is, as we have hinted, that although thrones go crash and kings go where they can, the Cris and Jobuses bend their respected heads like reeds, and let the whole whirlwind sweep above without uprooting them. The signboard and landlord of the Inn are changed, but cooks and waiters are the same ; and inasmuch as the public depend rather on the cooks and waiters for comfort and good attendance than upon the landlord and the signboard, this may serve to explain why the collapse of many thrones effects less in the general weal than the displacement of a single Jobus might do. Anyhow, when Cœurpreux came to report himself at the War Office, he found there the set of clerks who had just been rolling the army into the chasm, filling up printed papers that were to roll other armies the same way, with their habitual serenity. It was Sunday, and they had no need to work ; but never mind that ; they were always ready to devote themselves to their country's good, especially on a Revolution Sunday, when, if absent, their places might be filled up by other folk. Nothing was altered, save that in the room of the little big clerk, who had received Cœurpreux before, a bust of the Emperor had disappeared in favour of a photograph of General Trochu, and the small clerk informed his visitor that he had foreseen all along how it would end, and that if his—the clerk's—advice had been taken, matters would have turned out very differently. He supposed Colonel Cœurpreux would be asked to form and command a regiment during the siege, but he could give him no orders for the present. He only ventured to warn him (and looked very immaculate in so doing) that he must now moderate the Bonapartist zeal for which he had been unfavourably

conspicuous. The Empire had disgraced itself, and no Frenchman worthy of the name could feel any sympathy for so odious a *régime*: "Odious a *régime*!" echoed Cœurpreux, as the blood mounted to his face. "And who made it odious but you and your likes? Ah, sir clerk, try and give me and others as little of your advice as possible, and the better it will be for us all. When I think that the earth once swallowed up a pair called Dathan and Abiram, and when I see you sitting alive there with that heap of papers, I am inclined to wonder whether we are footing the same globe. Heaven help me!" and he went out slamming the door, and shaking the dust off his feet. The Jobus-clerk, naturally much disgusted, preserved an attitude full of dignity, and on the first opportunity informed General Trochu that a certain Cœurpreux was in all likelihood a Bonapartist conspirator, and might with advantage be despatched to outposts where the shells fell thickest. The General promised to make a note of that matter, and eventually did.

But Cœurpreux's 4th September trials were not over yet. On his way from the War Office back into the noisier part of Paris, where he hoped to learn for certain who were definitely the new rulers of his country—a point on which, in common with other men who accept new Governments like wind and rain, as they come, he was still doubtful—he crossed a victoria carrying M. Nepos Lémargeux Desfonds de Cri, an umbrella, and a carpet-bag. M. de Cri checked the driver, and waved the umbrella to attract Cœurpreux's attention. This chivalrous prefect had put away the rosette which used to grace his button-hole, and which of yore he had grovelled so patiently to earn, and he had so arranged things that the title of a republican newspaper peeped over the edge of his breast pocket, herald of

his new-born convictions. In this guise he stretched forth his hand to Cœurpreux out of the cab in the midst of the Rue Royale, and gabbled—

“Congratulate me, Commandant—at least, no, you’re Colonel now—congratulate me, I’m off.”

“Where to—the army?” and the Colonel wondered whether mayhap this person had been stricken with honesty in his declining years, and impelled to do something in defence of the country that had been such an unchanging and untiring milch-cow to him.

“The army? oh no—I leave that to Bayards like you,” sniggered M. de Cri, as if vastly tickled by the notion. “No, I’m off to my prefectship, which has just been confirmed to me by Gambetta; and I may tell you, in confidence, that I managed this thing very slyly. Foreseeing, you know, after the first defeat of you gentlemen, how the wind would soon blow, I came up to Paris on the quiet, and entered into relations with all this crew, Favre, Simon, Gambetta. I promised that if there was a republican rising, I would abet them, and play my department into their hands, which of course was all chaff, for if the rising hadn’t been successful here, I shouldn’t have been such a ninny to start pranks out there, but they took it in. They accounted me as one of theirs, and here am I off as a prefect of the Republic to the town where yesterday I was a prefect of the Empire—and I hope for promotion soon. *Sic itur ad astra*—hee, hee!”

“And what will Mdme. de Cri think of this sudden conversion?” asked Cœurpreux, with more contempt in his voice than would have served to wither up any other ten men not being hereditary place-hunters.

“Oh, my wife; it’s she who advised me to do it all. *Dux fœmina facti*—hee! hee! You see we’ve no private

fortune, and if I'd lost my place I don't well know what I could have done, for I have saved little—a man who expects to be Cabinet Minister, and will be able then to rig the money-market and clear what sums he pleases, doesn't go in for cheese-paring economies, you know; so my wife said to me, 'Make the best of our national disasters: it's an ill wind that blows *nobody* good;' and, as you perceive, that is true enough, for there are plenty of folk will be housed well to-night who were not much to look at yesterday."

Cœurpreux turned sick at heart. On an ordinary trimmer he would not have wasted a breath of scorn—nor so much as a shrug—disdaining such vermin as a sportsman does rats; but that Violette's husband should be a man of this class, and that he should have inoculated with his sordid principles a woman who had been true and pure before she had been sold to him in bondage, was a pang indeed. Yet Cœurpreux had the comfort of believing that M. de Cri lied ignobly, and that Violette had never consented to the impudent barter of conscience which her husband laid to her charge. But in this he was mistaken. Wedded to him, Violette would have endured poverty without a murmur, and scaled with a glad brave heart any heights of heroism and self-sacrifice to which he had chosen to lead her. But poverty along with M. de Cri was a very different story, and Violette had really asked her husband to make what he could of the general ruin which was bowing all patriotic heads in shame. This would seem to show that heroism, like other plants, needs special soils to make it thrive, and that wives are but as looking-glasses in which their husbands' souls are reflected with more or less fidelity. M. de Cri's soul being a dingy one, Violette's partook of it in many domestic features. This is not

poetry, but it is the truth which meets us at every step; and had it not been so—that is, had Violette wished to remain heroic after her marriage to one like M. de Cri—she must have become a faithless wife, which is a dilemma worth brooding over by moralists great and small.

IV.

Two years and a half sped by, and, at the beginning of the year 1873, it began to be bruited in the prosperous town of Seinebourg that General Cœurpreux, who commanded the district, would shortly marry M^{de} de Cri, née Violette Desprès, the widow of the late lamented Prefect. People were still full of the details of M. de Cri's untimely death, and of the imposing funeral which had been decreed him out of the public taxes. At the time when the Commune was raging in Paris, the striking (or, as they are by some humorously called, the "working") classes of Seinebourg had tried to get up a similar institution for themselves, and might have succeeded but for General Cœurpreux. Before he had time to parley with them, or adopt their views to save his precious life, the Communists slew M. de Cri with an accidental bullet. Whereon orations in his honour were solemnly pronounced in the National Assembly; a pension was voted to his widow; and the municipal council of Seinebourg, escorted by a whole regiment, with muffled drums and arms reversed, followed him to his grave, where soon after a monument was erected on which a local journalist proposed to inscribe the words, "*Sta, viator, martyrem calcas!*" There are men whose luck attends them beyond the tomb. After hoaxing mankind in this life, they bamboozle it through ages to come by means of perjured epitaphs.

As for General Cœurpreux, he was the man who had covered himself with what little glory was gleaned during the siege of Paris. He had fought, not talked. His regiment went to battle without bragging, and returned always thinned, but never daunted. The War Office clerks opined that it was scandalous a man should rise from Captain to General of Brigade in less than two years, and they busied themselves actively to get him shorn of some of the honours he had earned whilst they sat by their fireside, hoping with brotherly unanimity they might soon be called in their official capacities to record his death. But the Commission which was appointed to revise the distinctions conferred during the war rose bareheaded when Cœurpreux was introduced, and the General who presided handed him his commission ratified by the signatures of the entire Board. The Provisional Republic sent him to command at Seinebourg, and Cœurpreux accepted the appointment because he considered the Republic a provisional one and nothing more. He made no secret of his opinions on this head, and continued to speak of Napoleon III. as Emperor, without prefixing an "ex." Had the Republic been consolidated, his good friends the clerks would have had the gratification of writing to request he would resign; as it was, the big people of Versailles kept a watchful eye on him, and booked him mentally as a dangerous man, who must be tolerated for his good services, but shelved as soon as feasible.

Perhaps, in truth, Cœurpreux's conduct was not quite prudent. In his rooms he hung portraits of the Emperor, the Empress, and the Prince Imperial. Three times a year—that is, towards the 16th March, the 15th August, and the 15th November—he applied for a week's leave, and went to Chislehurst, with a bouquet of violets made in

Paris and of a yard's circumference. He offered this fête-day tribute to the exiled family, and assured them of his unwavering devotion; then he returned, and if people asked him where he had been, he replied simply: "To do homage to my Sovereign." Seinebourg was a righteous town, which drove an honest trade and went to church when it had time; but it did not understand chivalry pushed to this length. It had given the Emperor an enthusiastic reception once when he had visited the town, and witnessed with unmixed satisfaction the prosecution of journalists who assailed his rule. By and by it had vouchsafed a reception equally enthusiastic to M. Thiers, and watched with undiminished pleasure the chastisement of scribes who cavilled at this new state of things. If the Emperor had returned, there would have been a third reception, quite as enthusiastic as the two preceding ones; but pending this consummation, it was idle to express opinions which were, at best, premature, and which might interfere with the due profits of business. So Seinebourg, as represented by its commercial men, who are the salt of this world, eyed their General rather askance, but contrived to be civil in their tones when they talked to him of the Napoleons, for Cœurpreux had an awkward trick of frowning if there was any slip of the tongue in apportioning the responsibilities of the war's disasters; and it was known that he had handled a republican big-wig somewhat unceremoniously. Said the big-wig: "Monsieur de Sedan must have more pluck than I should give him credit for, if he hopes ever to put us under his heel again." This was at a dinner: Cœurpreux stared him in the face, and answered: "May I inquire what you were doing whilst he whom you call M. de Sedan was under fire of the Prussian batteries?" The big-wig looked much shocked, for it so chanced that

he had been engaged at the time in question in writing a series of newspaper articles on the degeneracy of the French army ; but he declined furnishing this explanation, or indeed continuing the conversation in any way, for there was no knowing but that with such an unmannerly person it might lead to an encounter in the field, and to France becoming by one republican the poorer—which was a catastrophe by no means to be desired.

It will naturally be supposed that to recompense him for his disfavour amid the republicans, General Cœurpreux passed among Bonapartists of all sizes and denominations for a trusty knight, and was well beloved ; but this would argue small knowledge of the human mind as politics do fashion it. The most active men in state factions are those who have most interest in the game, and those who are most interested are seldom, if ever, those who are most nice. Cœurpreux was a Bonapartist, but his loyalty did not extend to all the weedy people whom the Bonapartes had delighted to honour. He said some very rough things about certain of these gentlemen, asserting that he would rather see the Emperor in exile than have him return with some of his old advisers, for that at Chislehurst at least his honour was safe ; whereas on the throne, and acting as the tool of sundry personages he could mention, his fair fame was slurred by all the foolish and villainous deeds committed in his name. This was not pleasant to hear. Such of the Jobuses and Cris as had not been able to secure posts under the Republic, and were consequently loud in proclaiming that they would scorn to accept such if offered, insinuated at Chislehurst, even as they had done at St. Cloud, that this Cœurpreux was a man of crafty mood, whose pretended staunchness was nothing but a device for being amply recompensed when the Empire returned.

Probably he aspired to be a senator or War Minister—for there is no knowing where the ambition of such men will stop : meantime they gave him a wide berth, and thanked Providence they were not as he was—which was wise on their part, for a soul like Cœurpreux's is not that which pays best here below. Altogether, if Cœurpreux had reckoned all the people who were his true friends, he might easily have computed the total with the fingers of one hand. But what did he care? His conscience let him rest, and Violette admired him with all her heart—this was quite enough for his desires.

He went to see Violette every day, and the love which had lain in abeyance during the years of her marriage grew and ripened. Cœurpreux's character was a wonder and a study for the woman he worshipped ; and comparing it with that of her late lord, so unhappily deceased, she would fall into reveries how it was possible that two men could be so unlike. It has been said she was frivolous, and doubtless till she came to know her lover well, never suspected there was stainless honour anywhere but in story-books. M. de Cri used to talk of stainless honour, rectitude of purpose, unsullied principles, &c., at public banquets, and the salaried newspaper of the prefecture used to write of stainless honour at so much a column. But M. de Cri would put off his stainless honour when he got home, as he did his silver-laced coat, and the salaried journalist of the prefecture was a poor rogue who sold himself to the highest bidder. Sometimes Violette heard two men dubbed men of honour because they had quarrelled and fought about a ballet-dancer who was faithless to them with a third. And at other times she saw men of honour who had eloped with other men of honour's wives. There were women of honour who sold

their daughters to dilapidated but rich debauchees, girls of honour who submitted very willingly to the sale, and priests of honour who blessed the transaction in the name of Heaven. There were financiers of honour who signed the prospectuses of bubble companies; statesmen of honour who truckled to the people with false flatteries; and electors of honour who bartered their votes for what they could fetch. These were the beings of honour amongst whom Violette's acquaintance had always lain; and she had somehow learned to define a man without honour as one without money. She could not at first get used to Cœurpreux's way of dealing with people whom she had been wont to reverence; it was as if he had knocked together a number of sham bronze statuettes, and they had all smashed in the process, revealing their composition to be only bad plaster. She heard of his doing great and generous things in a secret way, and he would never own to them or talk about them. He shook the hands of people he esteemed with a grip of iron, and smiled to them with his whole face; but to persons he mistrusted he was barely civil, no matter how much gold lace they might sport on their swallow-tails. To Violette, however, he was gentle and kind, always submissive; and, though she was aware of how poor an idea he entertained of the martyred M. de Cri, he never alluded to him with disrespect—in fact, he never alluded to him at all but once, and this was on the day when she had promised to marry him so soon as her second year's widowhood should be completed. They were sitting together. He coughed a little; then, with some shyness, touched upon money matters, and expressed a wish that she should resign the pension she had of Government, and, indeed, all other monies—the sum was slight—bequeathed her by M. de Cri. He

suffered visibly during the explanation this entailed ; but it came to this, that M. de Cri's earnings did not seem to him very clean things. He had pocketed salaries all his life by changing his opinions as fast as his interests required it ; and, applied to minor operations in finance, this sort of thing was called obtaining money under false pretences. The phrase was not a euphonious one ; but truth never was euphonious. For all this, Cœurpreux said nothing to wound Violette, and she consented to everything, as women will do for the men they love. If the lamented M. de Cri could have risen from the grave and beheld his wife promising so cheerfully to denude herself—she who had cost him a tidy fortune in dresses, and had never failed to draw her pin-money when it became due, and occasionally in advance—he might have indulged in some ghostly meditations on the ways of women and the difficulty of fathoming their natures.

So it was agreed that on the 18th of March, the day after he should have returned from carrying the Prince Imperial's birthday bouquet to Chislehurst, Cœurpreux should take Violette to wife, and never more part from her.

"It is now the 2d of January, Violette," he said fondly ; "and do you know, when I think of the happiness in store for me, I feel sure that, could I have foreseen it years ago, I should have worked so as to be a field-marshal by this time, or turned coward for fear of being cut off from you."

"And if *I* could have foreseen it, I would have striven to be more worthy of you than I am," she answered, looking up into his eyes ; and her own brimmed as she did so, for she never thought of his long constancy to her without being moved to the heart.

Cœurpreux went off to review his men, riding spiritedly

down the red-trousered lines, and scanning them with pride when they executed their movements as soldiers should do, smartly and without blunder. He gave the colonels under him some trouble ; and the soldiers would not have liked him the less if he had marched them about less often. But General Cœurpreux was no idler, and had never earned his pay by lolling about with his hands in his pockets. Besides, at this period he had most significant reasons for seeing that his men drilled well. It is pretty well known at this time by all who care to know it, that in the month of January of the year 1873 the Bonapartists had determined upon attempting a *coup-de-main* in the month of March, and that the operation which the Emperor undertook at the beginning of January was intended to enable him to ride on horseback and re-enter France, as his uncle had done after his escape from Elba. The Emperor had affirmed that he would delegate to no one else the honour of heading the movement, and it was understood that some six weeks after the operation he would be in a position to ride. Several generals had been sounded, and amongst them Cœurpreux. The wire-pullers of the party would have done little for our friend after the victory ; but he was a useful man before and during the struggle, so their words were sweeter than honey from the honeycomb. Cœurpreux's answer was plain :

"I regard the Emperor as the lawful sovereign of France, until the last plebiscite shall have been cancelled. If his Majesty lands in France, I shall call upon my men to rally round him ; if they mutiny, I will go alone ; and if we fail, I shall give myself up to these Republicans, or whatever else they call themselves, and let them shoot me at their leisure."

This is why the Imperialist soldier kept a quick eye to the marching and counter-marching, and was precise in

seeing all the movements that concern firing and charging with bayonets practised repeatedly, until perfection was attained. There could have been no more enlivening sight for a true republican, knowing what was in General Cœurpreux's mind, than to have seen these nimble red-trousers strutting and wheeling under the General's direction, kneeling, loading, discharging, and doubling forward with bayonets fixed, as if they were already sweeping Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and the entire rights of man, off the globe's surface.

It was on the afternoon of the 9th January that, returning to his quarters in very hopeful spirits after a few hours' manoeuvring, which had fairly worn out every one save himself, Cœurpreux was greeted by the orderly, who wore a blank, scared look, as he helped him to dismount. Bad tidings come always suddenly, and the soldier's face was that of a messenger of woe: "General, have you heard the news?" he asked, holding out in a trembling hand a special edition of a cheap paper.

"What news?"

"The Emperor's dead, General."

Cœurpreux had half swung himself out of the saddle, but the announcement struck him like a bullet; he reeled and would have fallen, but for the orderly, who caught him by the arm and sustained him.

"Thank you," he stammered; "it'll be nothing. Where's the paper?" And he walked in, passing his hand over his forehead and stepping unsteadily. A child might have knocked him down.

The news caused little commotion at Seinebourg, or anywhere else in France. Out of sight out of mind, is never so true as in the case of French Emperors; but people noticed, not without sympathy, that General Cœur-

preux appeared in deep mourning, and in uniform wore a crape round his arm. He was depressed and silent too, and as soon as the day for the funeral was fixed, the clerks at the War Office received, unsealed, and perused this letter, which had a deep black border :

"To his Excellency General de Cissey, War Minister.

"12th January.

"GENERAL,—I have the honour to solicit of you a week's leave, in order that I may attend the funeral of the Emperor, and pay to him my last tribute of veneration and gratitude.—Pray receive, &c.,

JEAN CŒURPREUX."

The clerks stamped the letter, filed it, laughed at it among themselves, and answered it in this wise :—

"To M. le Général de Brigade Cœurpreux.

"GENERAL,—In answer to your letter of the 12th, I am directed to inform you that an order will be issued in to-morrow's *Journal Officiel*, refusing leave to all officers to attend the ex-Emperor's funeral. A few exceptions will perhaps be made to this rule, but after giving the matter his most anxious consideration, General de Cissey does not judge it expedient to include your name among them.—Pray receive the assurance of my deep respect,

"Z. JOBUS-HURLANT."

Post for post came back this, again with a black border :—

"To his Excellency General de Cissey, War Minister.

"GENERAL,—I respectfully beg you will accept my resignation. The Emperor did too much for me whilst he was alive for me to forget what is owing to his memory now that he is dead.—I have the honour to be your Excellency's obedient servant,

JEAN CŒURPREUX."

And lest the small incidents of history should be forgotten, which ought not to be, seeing that of them is made

up the fate of empires, let us cut out this slip from the *Journal Officiel* :—

“ M. le Général de Brigade Jean Cœurpreux, Commander of the Legion of Honour, &c., has tendered his resignation.”

“ ARMY APPOINTMENTS.—Colonel de Cri-Hurlant to be General of Brigade in command at Seinebourg, vice General Cœurpreux ; Lieut.-Col. Jobus to be Colonel ; Commandant Jobus-Cri to be Lieut.-Colonel ; Captain Jobus-Hurlant to be Commandant, &c.”

General Cœurpreux attended the funeral at Chislehurst, and was among the foremost of those who did homage to the Prince Impérial in the levee held at Camden Place after the sad ceremony was over. He returned to France with a trainful and a boatful of passengers who had gone on the same pilgrimage as himself ; but several of whom wondered naïvely that he should have thrown up his commission for such a purpose. They had few of them sacrificed anything themselves, and they prophesied that some of his brother officers might resent his conduct as an affectation of being more disinterested and virtuous than themselves, which is always inexpedient. Cœurpreux found that many of his brother officers did take this convenient view of the case, as was natural. Was it to be considered, forsooth, that they were less mindful of past favours because they were less quixotic ? Quixotic is a useful word. If we could marshal into column all those who have snubbed others by its means from doing kind and noble things, and all those who have been so snubbed, what a pair of imposing hosts they would make on the march of modern progress !

But we may conclude that Cœurpreux was consoled by Violette, who judged the matter as he did, though all these events indeed retarded her marriage for some months.

Cœurpreux did not consider it seemly to marry within half a year of a bereavement which he mourned for as when his father had died. Moreover, being now reduced to his half-pay and his savings—the which, for one so open-handed as he, were not considerable—he would apply, he said, for appointment on the Bonapartist press, in order that he might defend the dynasty he loved with his pen until the time came for championing it again with his sword. Assuredly, when the Jobuses and the Cris saw him embark on this venture, which is the forlorn hope of political outcasts, they must have rejoiced exceedingly one and all, and hoped that before long the Government of M. Thiers might be moved to imprison him at Ste. Pélagie. And maybe they promised each other a banquet to celebrate this auspicious day, for it is good to be merry in season.

V.

But the turns in fortune's wheel are more numerous than even the Jobuses who feed on the budget; and about the beginning of June 1873, an erect man in evening dress, but wearing black gloves, might have been seen descending at early morning from a fly at the gate of the Prefecture of Versailles, where Marshal M'Mahon, the new President of the Republic, was lodged. He entered the door well known to suitors and reporters during M. Thiers' well-meaning reign, and exhibited a letter of audience to the aide-de-camp on duty.

"The President has summoned me to a private audience at ten o'clock," he said.

"This way, General," answered the aide-de-camp; and within a few minutes General Cœurpreux stood alone with his old chief, who looked at him and shook his head.

"Did not I warn you, Cœurpreux, not to dabble in anything that might displease anybody—politics especially, which are no game for us soldiers?"

"Till we become Presidents," answered Cœurpreux, with a grave smile, as he bowed and pressed the hand which the hero of Magenta extended to him.

"Yes, till we become Presidents—that's it; but we can't all be Presidents." And the Marshal's iron feature relaxed about the lips, though it is chiefly with eyes that he usually smiles. "Now listen, Cœurpreux: I hear you were going to be married; and my advice is, don't delay about that ceremony, for your wife will keep you out of mischief. And see here—there was some informality in your resignation; so it is cancelled, and I have signed you a new commission; but if I hear of your meddling again in state business"—and here the Marshal paused and frowned—"I give you my word I'll put you in a Government office; and if that doesn't make you less of a rebel, I don't know what will."

"I am not likely to rebel against your Excellency," responded Cœurpreux, whose face lighted up as he received his commission.

"No, but you must let the clerks alone, now that they're under my wing. Ah yes, I know what you're going to say: that you can never forget, and will be always faithful, I know; but you had better be off, or they'll say we're plotting for Napoleon IV. together."

"I had rather we plotted for Napoleon IV. in March 1874, when he will be of age to govern; and if your Excellency decides to do so then, remember to count me among the fighting conspirators," rejoined the incorrigible Bonapartist.

PRINCE MOLESKINE'S CONSPIRACY.

PRINCE MOLESKINE'S CONSPIRACY

A RUSSIAN SOCIALIST BUBBLE.



I.

AND so it was announced in all the newspapers of Paris, that Prince Moleskine, having seen all that there was to see in the Capital of capitals, was about to return to his own country to accept a high post under Government.

The journal which first spread the tidings was the world-known and fashionable *Gazette des Boulevards*. Thence the news was copied into most of the London papers, one of which, in the letter of its Paris Correspondent, added a few particulars which I may as well transcribe *verbatim* :—

Prince Moleskine, that elegant and accomplished cavalier, with whom more than one of my lady readers has certainly danced at the Court Balls of the Tuileries, is one of the wealthiest landowners of the Muscovite Empire. We must go back in recollection to the mirificent era of the Grand Monarque to find in France anything approaching in splendour to the estate and château of Moleskine. I, who frequently dine with the Prince at his sumptuous mansion in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, can speak, from experience, of the exquisite urbanity of my noble host, of the delicate and *recherché* fare of his table, and of the never-ceasing flow of affability and wit, which makes the banquets

of the Hôtel Moleskine recall the dazzling feasts of Alcibiades and Lucullus. But what pen can worthily describe the ancestral domain of the Moleskines, situated on the River Kama, in the Province of Tcheremiss, and extending so far in its fertile expanse of field and pasture, wood and hill, that it would need the swiftest horseman seven days to traverse it? Ah, reader mine! let those who will rejoice over the Revolution of 1793, and gloat over the downfall of the fairest nobility in Europe, but suffer—yes, suffer—one whom party prejudice has never blinded, nor republican fallacies deceived, to give a short sigh of regret to those courtly times when chivalrous France—the France of Saint Denis, the lilies, the oriflamme, and the white banner—was not obliged to look abroad to behold baronial castles and princely manors. Up, shades of Robespierre and Marat! Up, rabble sans-culottes! and chuckle over your work! What are the riches of the wealthiest of your nobles, now—of a Montmorency, of a Luynes, of a Larochevoucauld—as compared with the wealth of Prince Moleskine? Like that scion of the House of Esterhazy, who, in reply to the British nobleman who had boasted of having three thousand sheep, answered calmly: “And I, my lord, have three thousand shepherds,” so likewise could Monsieur de Moleskine say to the wealthiest of France’s degenerate nobles: “For every acre of land you possess, I own a village; for every cottage, a farm; for every farm, a palace!” Ah! gentlemen of the nineteenth century! Ah! citizen-bourgeois! you have fallen upon fine times, when the state and luxury that were wont to find their homes on the banks of the Seine have taken refuge on the frozen shores of the Neva! No wonder the Boyard Moleskine should be impatient to return to his own land. No wonder he should yearn to be rid of our pinchbeck civilisation, with its cheap restaurants, cheap politicians, cheap coats, and cheap talents! He must feel himself stifling in this paltry, middling atmosphere of ours. *Bon voyage*, Prince! my respectful sympathies are with you; my best, most deferential wishes will follow you.

This effusion was much relished by the readers of the paper in question, who almost felt as if they knew the Boyard themselves upon hearing him alluded to so familiarly. It is not very certain, by the by, whether the

versatile correspondent just quoted had really ever sat in person at Prince Moleskine's table ; but, if he had not, it is of no great consequence. A writer whose occupations take him constantly into the *Grand Monde* is naturally too well bred to draw any distinction between the houses where he has actually dined and those where he would like to dine. His account of the Russian Prince was read by a countless number of good-natured folk, who imbibed it all as gospel truth, and fell to wondering naïvely whether the Prince's estate was as big as Yorkshire, or as big as Yorkshire and Lancashire both together. The women opined that it must be in size and beauty something like the Principality of Wales, and, though some of them marvelled that the high-toned journalist should call Paris a city of cheap restaurants, yet they thought it quite natural that a man who had such a prodigiously fine property as the Prince should find the French capital rather small, and should be in a hurry to get home again. Among those of the Paris public, however, who were not indebted for their acquaintance with Russia or with Prince Moleskine to imaginative "Own Correspondents," a quite different version prevailed as to the Prince's reasons for departing. It was pretty well known in the clubs and drawing-rooms which the Prince frequented, that he was in not the slightest haste to be off—nay, that, far from contemning our pinchbeck civilisation, with its cheap coats, cheap talents, &c., he had the highest opinion both of the civilisation and of the coats, and would gladly have remained in Paris until the end of his days, but for the awkward fact that he had run through every rouble of his money, and could no longer afford to live in our atmosphere, paltry and middling though it might be.

As for the ancestral domain of the Moleskines situated

on the River Kama, in the Province of Tcheremiss, and extending so wide that no horseman could cross it in seven days, the Prince himself was the first to laugh at it: "For," said he ruefully, "it is true enough that it would take a horseman a week to ride through my estate, but the reason is, that there is not a road in the place, and that half the property is composed of quagmires. And as regards the farms and villages," added he, more ruefully still, "I dare-say something might be made of them in good hands, but up to the present I have never been able to persuade my tenants to pay their rents, so that I do not think I should be much the worse off without them."

"Then you mean to say you are entirely ruined, my poor Prince?" observed the young Count de Lamotte de Bœurre, examining his friend compassionately through his eyeglass.

"Very nearly," answered the Prince, twirling a cigarette with melancholy composure. "Six years of Paris, London, Baden, and Homburg have run through all my stock of ready money. My agent writes to say he can't raise another kopeck, so that unless I manage to get a place out of Government, I must shut myself up on my estate, and eke out an existence on our national *tstchi*, or cabbage-soup."

"That won't last long!" interposed the joyous Marquis de l'Aumelette-Soufflée: "you will point out to your tenantry the reciprocal advantages of Quarter Day, and when you have enlightened their understanding and eased their purses, come back to us here in better spirits and stouter than ever."

"Mercury, the God of rent, hear you!" replied Prince Moleskine piously. "Though how to touch the understanding of a Russian peasant, now that our holy father the

Czar has abolished the knout, I confess seems to me a mystery."

The foregoing conversation was being held in a saloon of the Café Anglais preparatory to one of the five or six farewell suppers which Prince Moleskine intended giving to different batches of his friends before bidding adieu to France. He was not in a particularly festive mood—no Russian ever is when about to return to his native land—but he did the honours of his table with a becoming show of unconcern, and towards 2 A.M., when the product of Madame Clicquot's vines had been round some ten or eleven times, rallied sufficiently to take a hopeful view of his position. He had an uncle who was Cabinet Minister at St. Petersburg, a statesman of the old Russian school, strong upon protocols, and devoted to the interests of his family. He had never kept up much intimacy with this relative, whom, to tell the truth, he had always considered a bore; but he resolved that, on the next day, he would despatch him a few Mayence hams, a Strasburg pie or two, and a case of *Château Lafitte*. These delicacies would be sure to soften the Minister's heart, and might enable him to discover some snug sinecure where his nephew would be spared the humiliation of eating cabbage-soup and the painful necessity of retrenchment. Pleased enough with himself for having imagined this plan, Prince Moleskine adjourned with his friends to the club of the Rue Royale to finish the night—or, rather, to begin the morning—with a little *trente et quarante* at five napoleons the stake. When he returned home, precisely as the big bell of Notre Dame tolled six o'clock, he was still in a sanguine vein. He had lost three thousand francs, but this was a trifle. He remembered some fine sinecures under the Russian Government, which were worth ten or twelve thousand roubles a

year, and he felt no doubt that his uncle would have the good taste to put him in possession of one of them.

A few hours later, however, when Prince Moleskine had slept, dreamed, got up, and breakfasted, he found himself out of sorts and despondent again. The morning's post had brought him a budget of letters from friends who had seen his departure announced in the papers, and wrote, some to condole with and others to congratulate him on that high post under Government, which he was popularly supposed to have obtained. There were a good many tradesmen's bills, too, and these were not calculated to raise his spirits; for a man never sees so clearly how foolish a thing it is to ruin himself as when he contemplates the memoranda of his purveyors, and asks himself how much real enjoyment he has had for his money. As the Prince desired that his exit from Paris should be as dignified as possible—in other words, as he had no wish to go off clandestinely with the reputation of being beggared, he had appointed a fixed date for settling his debts and leaving France; and upon consulting his almanack, he now perceived that he only had six days left him. He took up a packet of visiting-cards and sat down to write in the corner of each of them, very moodily and reluctantly, the letters P. P. C. It is incredible how sorrowfully a Russian traces these letters when he is anywhere west of the Danube. And yet in Russia, as elsewhere, small boys are taught the virtue of patriotism; and Prince Moleskine, when at school, had been made to write from copy-book texts: "*Moscovia is the pearl of nations. Our Czar is the Father of his people.*"

Towards four o'clock, having dressed himself and filled his card-case, Prince Moleskine put a cigar into his mouth and went out on foot to take a turn down the Boulevards.

The air of the Boulevards is the quintessence of that Parisian atmosphere which Russians so love, and which poor Prince Moleskine had but a week more to breathe. Besides, on this occasion he had a particular object in selecting this walk. He possessed a good many literary and artistic acquaintances whom he wished to invite to his farewell suppers; and the Boulevards are a place where every Parisian who holds a pen or a pencil may be seen on business or otherwise between four and six.

As the Prince debouched on to the Boulevard des Italiens, the pavements and cafés were teeming with bustle. It was just the hour when the evening papers come out, and when editors and journalists, delighted to have got their work over, desert the dozens of offices in the Rue du Croissant and the Rue Montmartre, and spread in thirsty hordes along the whole line of thoroughfare between the Théâtre des Variétés and the Grand Hôtel. A wonderful amount of good-fellowship exists between French journalists, notwithstanding the spirit with which they abuse each other from the columns of their respective papers. The fact that the *Feuille de Chou* is at daggers-drawn with the *Feuille de Radis*, does not prevent the writers of those prints from fraternising very amicably when they have wiped their pens. They sit cheek by jowl in the same cafés; and though the *Feuille de Chou* has frequently accused the *Feuille de Radis* of being supported out of the secret-service funds, and though the *Feuille de Radis* has retorted the accusation with bitter irony, yet the combatants seem to think none the worse of one another, and will often take their absinthe peacefully and like good Christians at the same table.

Prince Moleskine had not walked far when he ran

almost into the arms of a small, dapper man, who was scurrying along at a racing speed with a glass in his left eye, and a large bundle of papers under his arm.

"I beg your pardon," said the latter rather testily, in the tone of one whose meaning is "Confound you!" and he was about to start off again, when, catching sight of the Prince's face, his own features cleared, and he exclaimed, holding out his hand:—"Oh, it's you, Prince. How do you do? You see before you one of the most unlucky men in Christendom."

"Unlucky, my dear Monsieur Roquet!" answered the Prince, laughing. "I can hardly believe that; I always see you so cheerful. What's the matter?"

"Ah! yes, unlucky and indignant too," continued the little man, beginning to gesticulate. "Look here!" and he drew from amidst his papers a long proof slip covered with corrections. "I declare it's infamous," he cried, "infamous and disgusting. There's no living in such a country as this any longer. But, stay, we shall be able to talk better in a café. Come along: here are two seats vacant."

And, without further ceremony, little M. Roquet, who appeared very friendly with Prince Moleskine, pushed him towards one of the tables outside the *Café Riche*, and shouted to a waiter to bring two glasses of absinthe.

"We can talk at our ease here," he proceeded, laying down his papers, and gabbling so fast that his words appeared to jostle and run over each other in issuing from his mouth. "I've told you already it's infamous and disgusting, and I repeat it. This is not a civilised country; we're worse off than you, Prince; Siberia's nothing to it. Ah! the brigands, with their press laws, and fines and imprisonments, and judges sold by the pack! Thought is fettered, sir; our tongues are padlocked, our pens loaded

with chain-shot! You don't believe it? You smile! Look at this, then, and see. I've never written a better article than this in my whole life. It's brilliant, caustic, witty. Oh yes, witty: for I know my merits, and I'm not ashamed to own them. It's the wittiest thing that's been printed for this many a day; for, betwixt you and me, there's not a man in France that can hold a candle to me in irony; and yet you perceive how the simpletons have hacked it about! And who do you imagine it is who has done this? Who, should you think, has been Vandal enough to run his pen through such passages as this, and this one again, and that one there? The Censorship? Not a bit of it; there is no censorship for papers. The editor? No, for I am the editor. Who then? Why, the proprietor, Prince, my own partner, my friend—hang him! Yes, you stare! No wonder; so did I. Isn't it enough to make one go mad and tear one's hair, and howl and emigrate to the end of the earth, and found a newspaper amongst the crabs and tadpoles?"

The little man stopped to take breath; gulped down a large draught of absinthe; and then started off again like an express train; his two eyes gleaming with the brightness of a couple of lanterns, and his voice growing shrill and sharp as an engine-whistle.

"But all this is just my luck, Prince. Fortune has played tricks with me ever since I was fool enough to buy an ink-pot, a pen, and a ream of paper. Never yet have I met with an editor whom I could convert to my views. Every one of them, without exception, has grown scared, shied, and finally thrown me over. The first I wrote under was poor Griffon—he's dead now, and I'm sorry for it, for I bear no malice. Before I had been a fortnight on his paper, I got him six months' imprisonment, and the printer

two. They ought both to have been uncommonly grateful, for it established the success of their business, and made the paper sell like bread in famine time. But they weren't. When Griffon was sentenced, he said: 'If it was you who had the imprisonment, Roquet, I should see no objection; but you've got off with six days; and what with fine expenses, and fees for defence, this affair has cost the paper 20,000 francs. Try and see if you can't tone down a little.' Of course I made an effort to do what he called 'tone down,' but I couldn't manage it. He used to shred my articles into ribbons. 'That'll never do,' said I. 'I'm a Republican, and must speak plain.' 'So am I a Republican,' answered Griffon; 'but that's no reason why I should ram my head against a stone wall. Our press laws are too hard for us, man; you must keep clear of them. It's a suicidal plan to tilt headlong against them as you're doing.' Well, the upshot of it was, that Griffon and I parted, and I went over to a new paper that had just been founded. I remained there exactly six weeks, and then an article of mine got the paper suppressed. The proprietor and editor cursed as I've never heard men curse before or since; so that I got disgusted and sent them both a challenge. We fought with pistols. I winged the proprietor, but got winged by the editor, and we had a month's imprisonment all round for fighting. I don't believe they were true Republicans, though; I suspect they were subsidised by the police. The editor used to cut the most telling hits out of my papers, and the article that sent us into court would never have crept in at all had he not been absent the day it appeared. After this I went about from paper to paper, but it was everywhere the same. My style was too sharp for them. Egad! I was not the man to mince matters. If Government had a sore place anywhere,

laid my finger on it at once, and made them shriek. The Ministers hated me like pitch. They tried to buy me. They had a special spy to dog me about. Ah ! you don't know what are the persecutions that a man of genius has to suffer in spreading the holy light of truth ! But dear Republic ! " (here the little M. Roquet uncovered his pate.) " I bore it all for thy sake. Yes ; one of these days, when thou hast broken the sceptre of the usurper in thy strong fair hands ; when thou hast shattered the throne into fagots to make fire for the poor ; when the palace of the tyrant has become an asylum for the homeless sick, and the drum of the prætorian no longer beats in our streets to remind us of our slavery ; then—yes, then, thou wilt remember how thy devoted child endured affliction for thee, how he loved thee, how he proclaimed thee, even in the face of the myrmidons of oppression, to be ever sacred, beautiful, and peerless ! "

M. Roquet delivered this apostrophe with the same volubility as if he had learned it all out of a book. A stranger hearing him for the first time might have fancied the honest little man's absinthe was too strong for him ; but the Prince, who appeared to know him well, listened with quiet attention, and made no effort to interrupt him.

" And now," went on M. Roquet, taking a new gulp out of his glass, and catching up his mangled proof again—" And now you want to know what this is. Look at these erasures ; look here, and look there, and tell me whether you don't think, upon your honour and conscience, that a man who could have marked out such passages must be sold to the police. The man who did it is Potiron, my partner ; for I scorn now to call him my friend. Six months ago, seeing that the Government and all the editors together were in league against me, I went to Potiron, who

was once a grocer, and has money, and proposed that we should found a paper together. He was to find the funds and I the talent. Said I, 'You'll be aiding in a glorious work, and you'll have tickets for all the theatres gratis; my name will soon raise the circulation to fifty thousand, and we'll share the profits.' Nothing could be fairer, and Potiron accepted. *La Carmagnole* came out, price three sous, and with me as editor. The first week we sold ten thousand, the next week twenty, the third week Potiron and I were in prison; but I edited the paper all the same at Sainte Pélagie, and the circulation went on rising and rising until we had reached fifty thousand, and the Government was half crazy. Well, would you believe it? Potiron was no sooner out of prison than he declared he had had enough of it! It is true we had had forty thousand francs' worth of fines laid upon us in instalments; but what of that? weren't we suffering for the good cause? I put it in this light to Potiron, and appealed to his manliness. But he said, 'Confound the good cause! if it goes on in this way I shall be ruined.' And this morning, when I came down to the office, what should I see but a barrister, whom the poltroon had hired to revise my writings and see that there was nothing actionable in them? You observe what a fine hash the two between them have made of my article; there's not a sentence they've left untouched. By Heaven! they've pared down my ideas until there's not so much as the rind remaining of them. But this was too much. I lost patience. I told Potiron to his face that I had found him out; that he was in the pay of the Rue de Jérusalem; and that he was playing into the hands of despotism. I threw down my keys—for I can no longer associate with venal individuals whom I despise—and here I am."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked the Prince.

"To-morrow morning, at six o'clock, I am going to fight Potiron in the Bois de Vincennes, with foils," answered M. Roquet, simply. "After that I think I shall go abroad for a year or two, and travel. France is not a country where a man of large views, like me, can live. The eternal truths of Liberalism are trampled down on our shores. Genius writes its leading articles with a sergent-de-ville on its right hand and a gendarme on its left. I am sick of it; I must have change of scene. I must try and forget that my country has given birth to such men as Potiron."

"What do you say to coming with me to Russia?" asked Prince Moleskine, smiling.

"Ah!" exclaimed the little journalist, looking up enthusiastically, "that's an idea! Russia is a virgin soil—at least, virgin for such a purpose as mine. The seeds of liberty have never been scattered there; the whole intellect of the nation lies fallow. I might found a paper, title, 'The Harbinger'—harbinger of truth, you know; price ten kopecks, published weekly in French, with cheap edition in Russian for the native workmen. You provide the funds and I furnish the talent."

"But," expostulated the Prince, who had not expected to be taken at his word, and was as much astonished as amused at the small man's earnestness—"But, my dear Monsieur Roquet, you will find gendarmes and police spies as plentiful in my country as here, and even more so: our press laws, too, are much less pleasant than yours."

"Ah yes, but there will be the glory of apostleship. Do you count for nothing the triumphs of John Huss, of Sävonarola, of Luther? the pride of being the first to spread light among a benighted people! I shall send my name down to posterity in the annals of your national history, Prince; and I shall write a book in three volumes

on the social condition of Russia, octavo size, bound in red, price five francs, six editions in the first month."

He had already drawn a pencil from his pocket and was rapidly making an inventory of the things he was likely to want for his journey. M. Roquet was one of those men whose brains appear to be perpetually simmering like the kettles of Cornish housewives. He bounced about with the restless activity of a fly in a drum. As soon as he had a scheme in his mind—and he had about twenty a day—he was for putting it into execution at once, and it cost him no more hesitation to set off for Russia at a week's notice than it would have done to go on a pleasure-trip to St. Cloud. There was no question about his being a man of talent ; but his talent was of that peculiar sort which is always getting its possessor into trouble. All government would be impossible if there were many such good-natured, wayward, feather-brained subjects as he. Opposition to constituted authority was with him a creed, as well as an instinct. Had France been governed by a Royalty, he would have been an Imperialist ; as it happened to be ruled by an Emperor, he was a Republican. Very conscientious withal, he had fought half-a-dozen duels with brother journalists who had taunted him with having no settled convictions, and he would have fought half-a-dozen more had anybody ventured to insinuate that he was bigotedly devoted to any particular party. Everybody in Paris knew him, and most people liked him, for he was generous with his money, wrote very drolly, and praised himself with so much naïveness that it was impossible to suspect his good faith. In his private conviction he esteemed himself not only the first journalist in France, but the first in Europe ; and the Government had done not a little to foster this opinion in his mind by the obstinate way

in which they had persecuted him. It was, perhaps, a failing in M. Roquet that he looked upon all who were not of his way of thinking as police spies ; but we are none of us perfect. Taken all in all, he was a pleasant-tempered fellow, and the fact that he always took the part of oppressed factions was proof enough that, whatever may have been his other defects, truckling to people in power was not one of them.

The Prince had frequently met him out, and thought him amusing and quaint ; but the idea of taking a journey across Europe in the company of such a man was not one he seriously entertained, and he began to grow somewhat alarmed on observing how firmly the notion had seized hold of his excited friend's imagination. He tried to throw out a few hints as to the uncivilised character of the Russian police, and the utter want of ceremony displayed by the Czar's Government in its relations with subversive prints ; but this in nowise damped the little man's ardour. "Oh," said he, with a wave of the hand, "forewarned is forearmed. I know I shall be persecuted : so was Alexander Herzen, who founded the *Kolokol* ; but after all what do I care ? They won't suppress me at once ; and before I am compelled to hold my tongue I shall have made my name as famous among your poor *moujiks* as it is among our own unfortunate, down-trodden proletaries."

(Proletary, by the way, was the word M. Roquet invariably employed in alluding to the working-classes. His readers of the Faubourg St. Antoine and the Quartier Mouffetard felt rather flattered by it. They fancied it was a synonym for "injured innocents," and it is not very certain M. Roquet did not think so too ; he found little time to consult dictionaries.)

"But I have an uncle who is a Minister," ejaculated the

Prince, looking rather blank, "and I am afraid he would not thank me, Monsieur Roquet, if he knew I was connected with an opposition paper."

"I am glad you've an uncle who is a minister," rejoined the journalist, complacently; "for that will save us from fleabite vexations. Open persecution I don't mind, but petty annoyances, such as the police heap upon one here, always put me out of temper. It's well to have a friend in a high place; he acts as lightning conductor. As to your uncle not liking the opposition, that, of course, is prejudice; we'll write him out of it, we'll convert him to our side. By the way, where do you live?"

"In the most desolate spot of all Russia," groaned Prince Moleskine, hoping to disenchant his tenacious friend. "I am two hundred and fifty leagues from a railway-station. The postman only comes near us once every ten days. There's not a man who can speak French within a week's journey of me."

"That's capital!" exclaimed little M. Roquet, rubbing his hands. "To be sure, I should have been glad to publish 'The Harbinger' at St. Petersburg, but I shall learn more of Russian life by being right in the centre of a peasant district. Besides, if we are so far away from a railway station, I shall be able to bring out a dozen numbers or so of the paper before the Government hears anything about it. I suppose there's a printing-press in one or other of the country towns near you? I'll write the paper and you shall translate it into Russian. A dozen numbers will be enough to revolutionise the whole district. Egad! we'll have a rising like those of Stenko-Razin and Pougatcheff. The other provinces will take fire. There will be some fighting, castle-burning, a general insurrection of the peasantry; the Government will be frightened into giving

reform, and perhaps a constitution, and you and I shall both have a statue. Waiter! two more glasses of absinthe."

"You go and be hanged," Prince Moleskine felt tempted to say, but he refrained himself, and remarked grimly, "I see you are bent on it, my dear Monsieur Roquet; but I warn you it's a dreary hole, and the cookery is detestable; we shall have nothing to eat but cabbage-soup."

"Prince," rejoined the small journalist, drawing himself up to his full height and laying his hand on his heart, "I am the son of my own works. My father sold shoestrings at a street-corner, and many's the time when I've gone to bed without so much as a crust of bread under my waistcoat. Do you think the fact of being obliged to eat cabbage-soup would deter me from undertaking the regeneration of a country? The Spartans lived on rancid broth and black bread, and yet Sparta begat Lycurgus and Leonidas."

"But I'm not of your opinion in politics," protested Prince Moleskine, getting desperate; "I'm not a republican."

"No, I don't suppose you are," rejoined M. Roquet indulgently, "for I don't suspect you've any political opinions at all as yet. You're a Prince, you're not thirty years old, and you've been amusing yourself all your life; what can you possibly know of politics? But I'll instruct you. I'll prove you that my doctrines are the only ones compatible with common sense, and you'll soon fall in with my views, for I observe you've a fair amount of intelligence."

After this flattering prediction there was nothing for it but to give in. Prince Moleskine shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

R

"Well, I start on Thursday next," he said.

"I shall be ready," answered the journalist. "Here's the list of things I shall want; I am going to order them to-night."

"You seem to make very light of your duel with M. Potiron," observed the Prince good-humouredly, as he rose to go. "Mind he doesn't run his foil through your plans!"

"No danger," answered M. Roquet. "He can't fence; we shan't hurt each other. By the way, I've not sent him my seconds yet: will you be one? And yet no," he added, quickly: "you're a nobleman—it wouldn't do. If my poor proletaries were to hear that I asked a Prince to second me, they'd fancy I had turned my coat."

"But what will they say, then, when they learn that you have gone to Russia with me?"

"Oh, in your country it doesn't matter. East of the Vistula every gentleman is a prince. Besides, who knows? we may convert Russia into a republic. Masaniello turned Naples upside down, and he was less of a man than I am."

Upon this the small journalist shook hands confidentially with the Boyard, and hurried away in the direction of the Rue Montmartre to hunt up two seconds, whilst Prince Moleskine, considerably astonished at the results of his afternoon's walk, strolled off to Chevet's to order some Mayence hams and some Strasburg pies for his uncle the Minister.

II.

A fortnight later the two fellow-travellers were at St. Petersburg. We have not wasted time by describing the farewell entertainments which the Prince gave his friends, nor the exemplary manner in which he paid all his bills, nor the regrets with which his tradesmen saw him depart,

nor the graphic style in which the fashionable reporters descanted on his splendid estate in the province of Tcheremiss, and the yet more splendid post which the Government of his country had begged him to accept. We have not dwelt, either, on the duel, in which M. Jean-Jacques Roquet wounded M. Théophile Potiron in the fleshy part of the leg, and was himself transfixed by that gentleman through the fleshy part of the right arm. All these events were duly chronicled by the Gazettes, most of which furthermore stated that M. Jean-Jacques Roquet had accompanied Prince Moleskine to Russia to enjoy the pastime of bear-hunting, a sport in which he was known to be proficient. Our friend, the Paris Correspondent, wrote to his paper as follows :—

I see that some of your contemporaries edit an absurd rumour that the Russian Boyard Moleskine has been ruined, and is leaving Paris for economical reasons. You may deny this on my authority ; there is not a word of truth in it. I was dining with the Prince last night, and he assured me that his crops had been excellent, and that sales of his short-horns (the Prince is a great cattle-breeder) were better this year than they had ever been before. He also gave me some valuable information as to the policy of Russia in the Himalaya question, which I reserve for another letter.. The Prince was very pressing in his invitation to me to come and take a month's bear-shooting with him, but, of course, I was obliged to decline this. I am expected at the palace of Compiègne next week, and could not for the world' disappoint my august Host and Hostess. You may insert confidently that the post to which Prince Moleskine has been appointed is that of Archi-Chamberlain to H.I.H. the Grand Duchess Basilika-Petrowna ; I have it from the Prince's own lips. Prince Moleskine is accompanied to Russia by a brilliant and distinguished circle of friends who are going to enjoy his hospitality. Amongst them, I quote from memory, the Duke de G—, the Duke de H—, the witty Count de X—, and my friend the celebrated journalist Jean-Jacques Roquet, who has promised me a bear-skin.

Whilst these veracious particulars were being set up in print, Prince Moleskine and his companion were being whirled across the Continent, dreaming very little of bear-shooting. The enterprising M. Roquet had set out on his journey with his arm in a sling, and with an imposing quantity of luggage. When once the train had started, he informed his friend that one of his boxes was full of works on political economy, and that another contained a small portable printing-machine, bought in case there should be any difficulty in finding a printer for "The Harbinger." This said, he lost no time in beginning the political education of the Prince, and treated him to vivid running commentaries on the manners, customs, institutions, and future prospects of the different peoples through whose countries they were passing. He was not effectually silenced until the Polish frontier, where the Custom-house officers, notwithstanding his indignant protests, confiscated his printing-machine, his box of works on political economy, a number of the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*," which he carried in his hand for desultory reading, the manuscript of a novel of his three parts finished, and a copy of the "*Journal des Débats*," discovered by one of the officials in the tail-pocket of his coat. As he made a good deal of noise at first, and talked of liberty, the rights of man, and other odd things, a functionary took down his name in a note-book, and telegraphed it to St. Petersburg; so that poor M. Roquet, who had been exceedingly glum during the last four-and-twenty hours of his journey, found a gentleman in a braided cap on the look-out for him when he reached the capital, and was followed to his hotel by this attentive person, who was good enough to dog him wherever he went for the first few days after his arrival. As ill-luck would have it, the two travellers alighted in St.

Petersburg on a day when there was a grand review of troops. The hotel where they put up was the best in the Newski Prospect; and M. Jean-Jacques Roquet, as he looked out of his window, beheld the entire length of the enormous thoroughfare, as well as the whole of the immense square of St. Isaac, filled with compact masses of soldiery marching in full uniform, and with a stiffness which only Russian warriors have, to the Imperial Park, where the reviews take place. There might have been fifty thousand soldiers or more, and very tough they looked. "Dear me!" muttered M. Roquet, "that's an amazing number of men, isn't it?" "Oh, that's nothing," answered Prince Moleskine significantly. "It's not half the garrison of St. Petersburg." And upon this M. Roquet could not help thinking that he had perhaps made an unfortunate choice in selecting Russia as the birthplace of his "Harbinger."

By way of acquainting himself with the periodical literature of the country he asked for a native paper, and a waiter in red plush breeches and a laced coat brought him up on a silver tray the "St. Petersburg Gazette," in the chief column of which he read this:—

The day before yesterday His Imperial Majesty the Czar deigned to go out shooting in the woods of Czarskoe-Selo, and met with an accident, the branch of a tree falling on his august head and prostrating him to the earth. Dr. Oiloff, the court physician, was at once on the spot, and his Majesty was graciously pleased to allow his head to be rubbed with an embrocation, after which he deigned to feel better, and by the end of the day was graciously pleased to feel no more pain at all.

Whilst the French journalist was occupied, very much to his stupefaction, in conning over this and other like paragraphs, Prince Moleskine was getting ready for a visit to his uncle. Out of courtesy he had sent to the Minister's

mansion immediately on his arrival to beg the favour of an audience, and had received the verbal reply, that he might come when he pleased. This seemed to him kind, for it does not take much to set a man hoping: and he started out rather cheerfully, attired in a dress-coat, white gloves, and a white cravat, as if he were going to the opera. The broad, empty wind-swept streets of St. Petersburg had, however, an unconscionably bleak look to him as he rolled through them in the rumbling landau of his hotel. He mentally compared the shabby crazy *droshkis* plying for hire down the roadway, the dirty, howling, bearded *isvost-shicks*, the small greasy tea-shops, and the dumpy, hard-featured Russian tradeswomen, with the smart cabs, coachmen, cafés, and shopkeepers of the pleasant city he had just left, and he prayed from the depths of his heart that his powerful relative might have some lucrative post to dispose of which would enable him—Prince Moleskine—to live six or seven months a year out of his native land—pearl of nations though it was. At his uncle's mansion, in front of which were two mounted sentries armed to the teeth, Prince Moleskine was kept an hour and a half in an ante-room: after that twenty minutes in a corridor; and it was not until he had seen some two score petitioners of various degree file before him that his own turn came. An usher with a gilt chain round his neck led him silently down a succession of passages, and showed him into a large, warmly carpeted room, where a thin man with gold spectacles and a face wrinkled like a baked apple, was writing letters at a table, and looking uncommonly sour and sulky.

Prince Moleskine had not seen his uncle, Prince Shepskine, for seven or eight years, and was a few seconds recognising the affectionate individual who did not so

much as hold out a hand to him, but addressed him abruptly in a snappish tone without even looking up from his papers.

"So you've come back to Russia, have you, Paul Petrowich,* and you've run through your last rouble of course, else I shouldn't see you here? I bet a thousand ounces of gold to a brass kopec that you've called to ask me for a place!"

This was as unsatisfactory a commencement as could have been imagined. Prince Moleskine had expected something quite different. He stammered, blushed red, and looked foolish.

"Don't try and tell a lie," pursued the statesman, taking a pinch of snuff. "Lies are in excessively bad taste, especially when they are useless. When I saw your Strasburg pies last week, I said, Paul Petrowich will follow soon after, and sure enough here you are. Now, what is it you want me to do?"

Paul Petrowich, who had not been prepared for such a summary method of conducting the conversation, found nothing to answer, and gazed fixedly at his own hat.

The Minister eyed him with apparent curiosity for a moment or two, then took out a roll of parchment from a drawer in his table, and pushed it towards his nephew:

"There," said he: "I knew you'd be here soon, so I made out your appointment on the day the pies came. You will be good enough to start to-morrow, and alone, please, for you've brought a jackanapes of a Frenchman with you, who had better go back to his country without

* Paul Petrowich means "Paul, son of Peter." Russians always address each other in this way; that is, by adding the name of a person's father to his, or her, own Christian name. In speaking to a woman, one would say, "Paulina-Petrowna," *i.e.* "Pauline, daughter of Peter."

loss of time. Your place is a very good one : Deputy-governor of Leghis, in the Caucasus. The salary is not large, but the emoluments are worth five or six times the actual pay ; and if you're clever,—which I don't believe you are, by the way, else you'd have married a girl with money, and not come back begging places of Government ;—if you're clever, I say, you ought to build up your fortune again in a few years' time, and then we'll make a Governor of you."

"The Caucasus!" exclaimed Prince Moleskine, who had turned pale at the dreaded name, and was staring blankly at the parchment. "But you really can't be in earnest, sir ; it's as bad as sending me to Siberia !"

"Do you mean to say you refuse?" asked the Minister, in a tone of anger and surprise.

"I can never go to the Caucasus," said the young man doggedly ; "your excellency knows you would never have gone there yourself, had you been in my place, and I in yours. What is the use of being born in the nineteenth century if one is to eke out one's days amongst a herd of cut-throat barbarians? Frankly, sir, I should not have troubled you if I had foreseen such an offer as this."

"Confound you! you forget to whom you're speaking!" shouted the little apple-faced statesman with indignation.

"No, I know I am speaking to my uncle," answered Prince Moleskine dismally ; "though I confess you have shown little feeling of kinship for me in this circumstance. All our other relatives have been enriched by you. It would have cost you nothing to give me a good place. It isn't out of your purse that the salaries are paid." The poor fellow's disappointment was so keen that he was uttering his thoughts with a frankness upon which he would

never have ventured had he taken time to reflect what a very sorry helpmate is plain speaking.

"Hark you, my nephew," said the Minister, throwing a furious glance at the young man, "I advise you to keep a look-out over that tongue of yours, otherwise it will be getting you into trouble. What have you ever done for me, I should like to know, that I should take you in hand, and enrich you? I am not speaking here of affection, for affection is a commodity which we Ministers learn to dispense with. But you might have been of use to me. A man with the fortune and position which you had, can always make himself serviceable, even when he throws his money out of the window. You have been six years in Paris, and have been spending at the rate of a million francs a year. What have you to show for your money? Have you a single friendship that can help either of us? have you acquired a grain of influence in diplomatic circles? have you taken a lead in French society and made yourself a name? have you secured any allies for me in the Paris press? Heaven knows you could have coaxed half the journalists of the capital over to our side had you chosen to try! But no, you have made a fool of yourself, and that is all. I have watched you narrowly; you have never laid out a sou that can bring you in any interest. You have stupidly frittered away every kopeck of a fortune that could have made you one of the most popular gentlemen of Europe had you invested it adroitly. Your habitual associates have been simpletons; you have never courted the society of respectable women, so that there is not a drawing-room in Paris where you can be said to have any footing. If I send you back to France as secretary of legation, or to one of the small courts of Germany as envoy, we should both of us be laughed at, for you enjoy the reputation of being a

noodle. Here is this Himalaya question in which we are involved. Is there a single newspaper in Paris that would publish a leading article for you, taking our view of the case? No, the whole Paris press is dead against us; the only intimate acquaintance you seem to have amongst journalists is this crack-brained M. Roquet, who has so high an opinion of your intelligence that he hopes to make a red republican of you after a few weeks' intercourse."

"And what if he does? I don't think I have much inducement to be an Imperialist," muttered Prince Moleskine bitterly, though he marvelled that his uncle should be so well informed as to the designs of the Frenchman. "Before this Emperor of ours emancipated the serfs, my estate was one of the most flourishing in the country. Now half my fields lie fallow; my tenants are emigrating to the south. The agent writes to say that he can get nobody to work, and not a kopeck of rent. I ought to be in the receipt of half a million roubles a year, and I am a beggar."

"Do you think any of us liked the emancipation of the serfs!" hissed the Minister, rising and speaking close to his nephew's ear. "I, too, should have been beggared if I had not been where I am. But the thing is done now, and neither you nor I can undo it. Don't be a fool, Paul Petrowich; take this place I offer you. There's many a man better off than you are would go down on both knees to have it. In a few years, I tell you, it will make you rich, and then we can see and give you something better."

"I won't go to the Caucasus," replied Prince Moleskine, out of temper and unreasonable from his disappointment. "I'd rather go and live on my estate, hole as that is."

"Then go to your estate," said the Minister, in a rage. "Only, I will tell you what, my nephew. So long as

you were cutting your capers in Paris you didn't hurt me. Here it is different. I've as many enemies as white hairs on my head ; and if you were to play any tricks in this country, or talk liberal trash within earshot of anybody, some of the responsibility would be sure to fall upon your relatives, myself amongst the number. Now you've ruined yourself, but I'm determined you shan't ruin me. You can go back to your estate ; but I shall have a sharp watch kept over your actions and speeches ; and as for that M. Roquet, he shall be conducted back to the frontier this very day. He can mean no good by coming here, and we've enough Radicals of our own without being in need of foreign importations. That's all I've got to say. Good-morning."

"You can do your worst," said the Prince doggedly. "I will do what I please, and say what I please, and have what friends I please."

The Minister shrugged his shoulders and rang the bell ; and with this exchange of amenities the interview terminated.

III.

The Minister did his best to have M. Jean-Jacques Roquet conveyed under escort to the frontier, but it was much less easy than he had thought. M. Roquet screamed and barricaded himself in his room, and harangued the hotel waiters. Prince Shepskine was not so firmly rooted in the favour of the Court as to risk doing an arbitrary act without a shadow of pretext. His main objection to the Frenchman was, that, being a notorious republican, his intimacy with the nephew of a Minister might give rise to unpleasant gossip amongst the crowd of envious folk who lie in ambush round men in high places to traduce and supplant them. But when he saw what a noise the man of

letters was disposed to make, he thought it prudent to let him alone, or, rather, to reserve the persecution of him for some more convenient opportunity. Prince Moleskine stuck valiantly by his friend, though in his heart of hearts,—having nothing but trouble to expect in his company,—he wished him at Kamtschatka. The police were instructed to offer an apology, and to declare that they had mistaken M. Roquet for somebody else—which they did with extraordinary good grace and civility. M. Roquet seized upon the occasion to ask for his printing-press, his works on political economy, his manuscript, and his “*Revue des Deux Mondes*.” The police gave him a blank form of petition to fill up, and after driving to seven different Government offices and conversing with twenty-three clerks, the journalist was assured that inquiries would certainly be made, and that he might call for an answer in six or seven weeks’ time.

Prince Moleskine, however, was in a hurry to be off, and hastened his preparations for that purpose. St. Petersburg is only supportable to those who have money. The Prince’s ruin was better known among his own countrymen than it was in Paris, and it is never particularly agreeable to be stared at, and pointed at, and even tittered at, as poor Prince Moleskine apprehended he would be, if he ventured to go into society. As for M. Roquet, the sedulous attentions of the man in the braided cap, who followed him closely wherever he went, had ended by giving him the nightmare. He, too, was anxious to be gone, and he heaved a sigh of relief when he found himself in the heavy landau that was to bear him away to the province of Tcheremiss. In addition to the Prince’s valet, groom, and cook, who journeyed everywhere with their master, the travellers were this time accompanied by a house-steward,

who had been engaged at St. Petersburg. He was recommended by the landlord of the hotel, and was a Pole, with a shock of red hair, and a surprising talent for murdering every language in Europe. He talked to the Prince's valet in German ; to his cook in Italian ; to his groom in English, and completely ingratiated himself with M. Jean-Jacques Roquet, by declaring that though his—M. Stanislas Milkiewicz's—body was in Russia, yet his heart was in France, in the land of Danton and Roquet ! The journey was as painful a pilgrimage as any man could wish to his bitterest foe, as an expiation for a life of sin. Save in winter, when the roads are frozen, and one can ride in sledges, Heaven help the bones of the Russian traveller ! Ruts two feet deep ; branches of trees lying across the roadway ; huge flints as big as cannon-balls ; and every couple of hours a break-down, with no houses or light, no wheelwrights within twenty miles to set matters straight, and a fierce howling savage wind sweeping up clouds of dust to blind the horses and choke the passengers. Here, the landau comes to a dead standstill, embedded up to the axletrees in slush, and the travellers have to get out and push and tug, and perspire until they are wet through, and covered from top to toe with mud. Further on, the harness breaks in two or three places at once, and has to be mended with bits of string, pocket-handkerchiefs, braces, or with one's necktie. One of the horses then lies down in the dirt, and refuses to move on. The Russian driver takes to coaxing : “ My little father, my pigeon, my pretty cousin, don't lie down so and break the heart of your poor *isvostshick*.” This occupies about half-an-hour, during which the travellers blow on their finger-tips, and flatten their noses against the window-panes, to see if there is a village within view. The roadside inns have nothing to offer one but a brick floor to sleep on.

People take their own provisions with them; if not, they must put up with bread, a few shades darker than the *schwarz-brod* of Germany, and infinitely more sour. Perhaps also they may get a piece of raw ham, derived from a gaunt, thin pig, tough and stringy; but this is doubtful. To crown the pleasures of the voyage, one must exhibit one's passport and road-bill five or six times a day at the posting-houses; and if one has let either of them drop in one of the numerous breakdowns, there is nothing for it but to go back all the way and get another. A Russian post-master would allow himself to be hashed into mincemeat sooner than allow you to pass without the written official order.

It was exactly five weeks after setting out from St. Petersburg, that the Prince, his friend, and suite, drove up the moss-grown avenue which led to Moleskine Hall, or Moleskine Castle, eighty-three versts from the town of Oufa, and twenty from the River Kama. The house had an imposing appearance, and gave the beholder an idea of regal pomp, until he got inside and saw the faded furniture, damp walls, cracked ceilings, and general look of desertion and squalor that hung about the old place, which had not been inhabited by a Moleskine since the time of the Emperor Paul. It took the two friends a week to organise themselves comfortable quarters, by selecting the best of the chairs and tables, the carpets and curtains with fewest holes in them, and the rooms which had least suffered from decay. Prince Moleskine was evidently humiliated at showing himself so considerably reduced from his Parisian splendour; but he was no longer sorry that M. Jean-Jacques Roquet had accompanied him, for life would have been simply unbearable in such a place without a companion. The journalist on his side bore

everything remarkably well. Before leaving Paris, he had obtained a commission as travelling correspondent to a daily paper, and he was no sooner settled in his new abode, than he fell to work, writing astonishing letters upon the things he had seen and passed through. Editors were only afraid of M. Roquet when he took to handling French affairs. There was no objection to his abusing Russia and the Russian Government, so that M. Roquet gave his pen and imagination full play. Unfortunately, as we shall see by and by, all his letters were stopped by the police; whence posterity has been deprived of the pleasure of reading many pleasant chapters, and doubtless of acquiring much novel information.

Three months passed in an uneventful manner, the days succeeding each other monotonously. Up to mid-day the Prince was generally busy with his agent, either riding about the estate, or going over accounts with him to see what could be made of his dilapidated budgets. M. Roquet during the same time wrote, with admirable care and zeal, the letters which were never to reach their destination, or busied himself about the first chapters of his work in three volumes on the *Social Regeneration of Russia*. In the afternoons the friends used often to go out shooting, the game on the estate being as abundant as if a gun had never been fired in the district. However, there is the stuff of a conspirator in every radical Frenchman, and M. Roquet was not the man to confine himself to exploits entirely harmless and peaceful. He had not come to Russia to enjoy himself, he was bent on dabbling in political achievements of some sort, and he had by no means abandoned his idea of preaching what he called his doctrines of truth among the *moujiks*. Unfortunately, there was no possibility of starting the light-disseminating "Har-

binger" in the district. In the first place, there was no printer within four-and-twenty hours' journey ; and in the next, none of the peasants, with the exception of the priest, the postmaster, and the tax-gatherer, could read.

M. Jean-Jacques Roquet was rather of the opinion of Cæsar, that it is better to be first at Moleskine than second at Rome. The little man could not do without his incense, and the homage of a posse of worshippers. He longed to see the honest, squab faces of the peasants gathered round him admiringly, and he cursed the difficulties of the Russian language which stood in the way of his addressing them on topics political and social, and awakening them to a sense of their degradation. He did not confide any of his sentiments on this point to his host, for he had noticed with chagrin that the Prince was less amenable than he had hoped to the language of truth and liberty ; but he took into his confidence the excellent Pole, Milkiewickz, who appeared filially devoted to him, and expressed his readiness to abet him in any schemes he might form for overturning anything or overthrowing anybody.

It was a great comfort to the zealous Frenchman to have this faithful Pole with him. M. Stanislas Milkiewickz agreed with everything he said, and was the person who always rode with his letters to the post, so that they might be in safe hands. When pressed to it by the journalist, M. Milkiewickz would tell a heart-rending tale of the afflictions which his family had endured at the hands of the Russians. At certain passages he used to tear his red hair out in large bunches, and run his head against the wall with avowed intention of putting an end to his miserable life. It took M. Roquet an immense deal of bodily strength and oral persuasion to reconcile him with exist-

ence: on a certain occasion the two fell into one another's arms and wept. How not feel confidence in such a man? One day M. Roquet revealed to him a scheme for holding secret socialist meetings among the peasantry of a neighbouring landholder, with an ulterior view to provoking an agrarian revolution.

The landholder upon whose tenants M. Roquet proposed to begin his work of enlightenment was a wealthy prince, who lived in St. Petersburg in winter, at Baden or Gastein in summer, and, like most Russian noblemen of fortune, never came near his estate save once in the course of every five years, to levy extra supplies of money. Of course M. Jean-Jacques Roquet could not do his friend Prince Moleskine the ill-service of exciting his peasantry to sedition, but he had no terms to keep with Prince Moleskine's neighbour, and it pleased him to think he might organise a rising by means of occult meetings held after nightfall in caverns or out-of-the-way barns, like the early Christians of yore, and the Albigenes. It was arranged that the Reformer should write his "Harbinger" in manuscript, and that Stanislas Milkiewickz should translate it into Russian, read it aloud to the peasants, and give copies of it to the two or three cultivated *moujiks* who could read.

It should be mentioned that the peasants were in as hopelessly miserable a condition as it is possible for human beings to be. The emancipation had not done them much good,—rather the contrary; for whilst they had been serfs they had always had food and clothes enough, whereas ever since they had been set free they had thought it better to remain idle than to work, and had borne the inevitable consequences. As far as it was possible to understand their ideal of a perfect social system, they expected their landlord to feed and clothe them for

nothing ; that is, without exacting labour or rent. They were very drunken, and, of course, servile beyond conception. On first arriving at Moleskine, M. Roquet had turned red with indignation on seeing that a peasant who brought him a letter knelt down in the mud on both knees to deliver it. He gesticulated to the peasant to rise, but the man, thinking he was going to be beaten, crouched down and whined. "Just Heaven !" exclaimed the apostle of liberty, "is this possible ?" And his devoted friend, the Pole, answered, "Alas ! it is. But we will enlighten them, Monsieur, and then they shall walk proudly like you and I"——

It was a grand day, therefore, for M. Jean-Jacques Roquet when, after six weeks of secret meetings in caverns and barns, he was set upon one afternoon by twenty *moujiks*, who carried him in triumph round a field, pawed him all over, kissed him, and then forced a pint of the national *vodki* (whisky) down his throat, as a token of their esteem. The cavern meetings had been a success. M. Roquet stood on a stool and preached in French, whilst M. Stanislas Milkiewickz translated his utterances into Russian. When any sentiment unusually fine left the lips of M. Milkiewickz, the peasants pounded their boots on the floor and threw up their hats. The passages best appreciated were those in which the iniquity of levying rent was exposed and reviled with bitter invective. "No landlords !" thundered M. Roquet. "No landlords !" echoed M. Milkiewickz, in a shrill falsetto. "No landlords !" roared the *moujiks*. "Every man earn his own bread by the sweat of his brow !" continued M. Roquet. "Yes, by the sweat of his brow !" clamoured the overjoyed peasants ; "and when the crops fail, then the landlords must nourish us !"

After every one of the meetings, and every week when the "Harbinger" appeared, M. Milkiewickz used to write a long letter to "a cousin" of his who lived at St. Petersburg. M. Roquet often wondered at the epistolary fervour of his confidant; but the Pole had such a good heart! He and his cousin had been brought up together, and the latter would be sure to fall ill, he said, if he did not receive four pages of close writing two or three times a week.

Things were at this juncture when throughout all the district it was rumoured that Prince Moleskine's neighbour, the Prince Roubeloff, was going to pay a flying visit to his estate, to raise money as usual. On like occasions it had been the antique usage of the peasants to groan, weep, and bury their earnings in the ground, whence they were only dragged out eventually by dint of menaces from the Prince's agent. On this occasion it struck M. Roquet that it would be a noble sight and a startling if the peasants, instead of groaning and hiding their money, were to gather boldly together in front of Prince Roubeloff's castle, to groan at that nobleman as he drove up to his door, to pelt him with a few stones, and obstinately to refuse paying rents. He consulted with M. Stanislas Milkiewickz, who waxed enthusiastic at the idea, and withdrew soon after to write a longer letter than ever to his cousin at St. Petersburg. The peasants were all sounded, and not a dastard heart found among them. The preaching of M. Roquet had given them courage. If he would only consent to head them, they, their wives, and their children would follow him wheresoever he chose to lead, and break all the windows of Prince Roubeloff's castle if he liked. M. Roquet was transported. He began to feel like Tiberius Gracchus and Masaniello.

Meanwhile Prince Moleskine had been growing a little astonished at the numerous goings to and fro of his friend. M. Roquet would disappear at unaccountable times, and return home excited and muddy at strange hours in the night. He never said anything to the Prince as to where he went nor how he busied himself, and when pressed very hard with questions would only answer mystically that he had the regeneration of a great people at heart. This alarmed Prince Moleskine, who had no great passion for regenerating, and one afternoon (it was on the eve of the day when Prince Roubeloff was expected) he asked his friend point-blank where on earth he spent his time when he went out of nights?

"Prince," answered the small man, who was flushed and looked unusually joyous—"Prince, there's no reason why I should conceal it from you any longer. If you come with me by and by you shall see."

This was all the Prince could extract until nightfall, but when dusk had set in M. Roquet took his host to a barn, at the door of which, to his considerable surprise, he made him swear eternal secrecy. This done, he pushed open the door, and the mystified Prince found himself in a large place, lighted by two flickering rushlights, but with not a human being visible. "There are three hundred regenerated peasants there!" exclaimed M. Roquet triumphantly, but saying this he stopped short and looked blankly round the deserted room.

"Hullo!" he shouted, "what's this? Hi! Milkiewickz, why are they not here?"

The faithful Milkiewickz had followed the two gentlemen to the door; but he had disappeared of a sudden and was not to be seen. The Frenchman went out to look into the dark, but as he set his foot on the threshold six men

surrounded him with lanterns. "In the Czar's name I arrest you," cried one, stepping forward. And another, walking up to the Prince, said : "Prince Moleskine, you must come with us to St. Petersburg."

"To St. Petersburg !" exclaimed the Prince astonished. "What for ?"

"To answer the charge of having organised a Socialist conspiracy with the aid of your accomplice, this Frenchman."

IV.

A few days later all the papers of Europe printed this telegram :—

A formidable Socialist conspiracy has just been discovered near Oufa, in the Province of Tcheremiss. Some thousands of peasants are said to be implicated in the affair, one of the objects of which was to assassinate the Senator Prince Roubeloff, to burn his castle, and then to provoke a general agrarian rising. The ringleader is Prince Moleskine, nephew of the Minister Shepskine ; and it is supposed that several leading members of the aristocracy are amongst his accomplices.

Soon after there was a trial, and the principal witness was the honest Milkiewickz, who turned out to be a police spy. His testimony was conclusive. M. Jean-Jacques Roquet and Prince Moleskine were, along with some two score of regenerate peasants, found guilty of conspiring to undermine society, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Prince Moleskine, however, as being a Minister's nephew, was secretly pardoned and ordered out of the country. On the "letters of mercy" which were delivered him in prison he found written, in his uncle's hand : "Paul Petrowich, this is in acknowledgment of the Strasburg pies. I think you will agree with me, that you would have done as well to go to the Caucasus."

As for M. Roquet, on hearing that the Prince had been amnestied, he exclaimed at once : "Ah ! I knew it. He was sold to the police, he and Milkiewickz together. When I get out of prison I shall send a challenge to them both. They have betrayed me ; but, what is worse, they have betrayed their country." And with grave indignation he added : "And to think that if it had not been for them Russia might now have been a Republic !" Needless to say that amongst the general public Prince Moleskine was credited with having contrived and organised the whole affair, and that amongst journalists, historians, and all who plume themselves upon a knowledge of politics, the plot will be known to the end of time as "Prince Moleskine's Conspiracy."

JACQUES GIRARD'S NEWSPAPER.

JACQUES GIRARD'S NEWSPAPER ;

OR, THE

TRIALS OF A FRENCH JOURNALIST.

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I.

THE owner of the *Reveil du Coq* of Seinebourg having died, his heirs decided to part with their property in the newspaper, and it was advertised to be sold by Master Desgots, notary.

Seinebourg is a manufacturing city of 100,000 souls, and possessed at the date in question three newspapers—the *Ordre*, which was the organ of the Prefect and appeared daily ; the *Progrès*, which represented the opinions of the advanced Republicans, freethinkers, and revolutionists generally ; and the *Reveil du Coq* above said, which advocated moderate views, with the customary result of being turn by turn extolled by all parties and constantly liked by none. The *Reveil*, however, being more often on the side of the Opposition than on that of Government, was in some sense an ally of the *Progrès*, and kept up a business partnership with it. Both papers were printed by the same firm,

had a common publishing office, publisher, clerks, carriers, &c., and appeared three times a week, but on alternate days. The *Progrès* came out on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; the *Reveil* on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

As a licence from Government is needed before a political journal can be started in France, and as such licences are but charily bestowed, the ownership of a newspaper constitutes a privilege; and the demise of M. Pierre Barcol, the *Reveil's* founder, proprietor, and editor, stirred up many would-be purchasers. The Bishop of Seinebourg would have been glad to get the paper into his hands and transform it into an organ of Ultramontanism; several local manufacturers were desirous of securing it to advocate protection for their trade, which was shoddy; and the Bonapartist Committee in Paris, ever watchful to recruit new adherents among the provincial press, put out feelers to ascertain whether it would not be possible to get hold of the paper without going to the expense of buying it. In other words, the Committee cast about for some ambitious capitalist, who, on promise of being well rewarded after the restoration of Napoleon IV., should consent to purchase the *Reveil du Coq*, and cause it to be edited subserviently to the Committee's views. Finally, there was the Prefect, who formed a scheme for making of the *Reveil* a Government organ in disguise, by acting on the Bonapartists' plan, and persuading some rich manufacturer to become the proprietor. The manufacturer should be allowed to expound what principles he pleased in religion and commerce on condition of his supporting the official candidates at election time—such support to be of course paid for by State honours.

All these conflicting claims seemed to bode a spirited

auction. In the political circles of Seinebourg it was bruited that the Society of Jesus were willing to lend the Bishop 200,000 francs to purchase the paper. At the Exchange the brokers pointed out to one another M. Bompain, a wealthy manufacturer who had been Mayor of Seinebourg under the Second Empire, and who was known to hanker after the honour of representing the city in the National Assembly. A newspaper would greatly assist him in pushing his candidature, and as his opinions were as staunchly Bonapartist as ever, he was doubtless the man whom the agents of Chislehurst would best love to see owner of the *Reveil du Coq*. On the other hand, there was M. Grosgriel, also a manufacturer, and M. Bompain's successor in the Mayorship. He too wished to become a Deputy, and he desired the Legion of Honour; he was the Prefect's very good friend, and he hated Bompain so cordially that if the two came into rivalry on such a question as the purchase of a newspaper, Grosgriel was the man to bid all his fortune sooner than let Bompain carry the day.

However, Bompain and Grosgriel were not destined to clash, nor was the Bishop obliged to borrow of the Jesuits, for at the moment when the prospects of an exciting sale seemed most certain, all disputes were in a manner allayed by the arrival of a new competitor, before whom all the others retired, declaring him with one common voice to be the fittest man to rule over the *Reveil*. This popular person was no other than M. Jacques Girard, who had been sub-editor of the paper during the reign of Pierre Barcol.

But what sort of man was this Jacques Girard, that all parties should be so unanimous about his merits?

Well, when a great number of persons are of one accord

in praising a particular man, it may generally be accepted that this man has the tact of offending nobody. He is good-natured, pliable, cautious—cheerful to render service, chary in expressing opinions, prompt to appreciate the humour, principles, and performances of others, but above all no genius, for genius is self-asserting, and self-assertion provokes enmity. Jacques Girard was a handsome, pleasant young fellow of thirty, with a shock of curly black hair, eyes that seemed always to smile, and teeth of extraordinary whiteness, which he was for ever displaying. His manners were modest and retiring, his temper was evenness itself; his luck in life had never been such as to arouse envy, and he was counted on all sides a thoroughly good, obliging fellow, “though not very sharp,” added his admirers. It was precisely this lack of sharpness which served him so well in the present instance. If Bishop, Prefect, MM. Bompain, Grosgriel, and others all considered Jacques Girard to be the fittest among men to manage the *Reveil du Coq*, it was because each reckoned that he might make of him a ready tool. M. Bompain put the case very neatly when he exclaimed, “Girard buy the *Reveil*! Ah! then it’s exactly as if the paper were mine without my having disbursed a franc for it!” And not less astute were the words of Grosgriel:—“Girard is a man whom I hold in the hollow of my hand. He would cut off his legs and arms to oblige me!”

Meanwhile the much-lauded Jacques Girard had gone to call on Master Desgots, the notary, and the very artlessness with which he broached his intention of buying the *Reveil* depicts the character of the man.

“How are you, Girard?” said Master Desgots, shaking hands without rising; for Jacques was one of those men whom nobody thinks of treating ceremoniously. “A sad

business this death of Barcol. So you are left in sole charge of the *Reveil* for the present."

"I should like to retain charge of it for good," answered Jacques in his breeziest manner, as he sat down. "I have come to tell you I shall be among the bidders on the day of sale."

"And how much shall you bid?" laughed the notary, for he knew that Jacques Girard was not worth a centime.

"The paper can yield, by good management, fifty thousand francs a year. I think I could go the length of bidding three hundred thousand francs for it," replied Jacques, computing on his fingers.

The notary started. He was a little man with not much hair, but a very tall forehead, over which he pushed his golden spectacles when he wished to examine an interlocutor with particular attention. It seemed as though his glasses were only of use to him when he wanted to see people dimly. Thrusting up his spectacles, then, and making an acoustic horn of his hand, which was another trick of his when he wished to prove that all his faculties were awake, he exclaimed bluntly—

"Three hundred thousand? Where are you going to get the money from? Have you come in for a legacy?"

"No, I have nothing in the world besides my salary, which is small."

"Well, but you don't expect anybody is going to lend *you* such a sum of money?"

"Not I." And it was amusing enough to note the genial humility of Jacques's avowal. "No, but our social system abounds in inconsistencies. Thus, if I were to ask any capitalist point-blank to lend me but one-tenth of three hundred thousand francs, he would show me out; but

if I were to ask him to give me his daughter, with the above-named sum, for her dower, it would be another question."

"Ah, I understand you are going to be married," ejaculated M. Desgots with interest. "Well, marriage will just suit your nature, my dear Girard. May I inquire the name of the happy young lady?"

"My dear M. Desgots, it is you who must give me her name, for, to tell you the truth, I have called to beg you to procure me a wife, and the richer the better."

Now, an English solicitor whom a client should accost in the above fashion might fancy that he was being hoaxed; but in France marriage is a business, and on reflection Master Desgots thought it quite natural that Jacques Girard should apply to him for a wife. To whom else could he have applied with greater certainty of obtaining the kind of consort he wanted? Master Desgots knew everybody in Seinebourg. He was the intimate counsellor of innumerable fathers who had daughters to marry, and before the sub-editor of the *Reveil* had waited half a minute for a reply the notary had already thought of five or six girls, and at least two widows, who would suit him perfectly. Nevertheless he frowned, and mumbled—

"Three hundred thousand francs is a large dower."

"But I am an eligible suitor," rejoined Jacques Girard, without departing from his habitual modesty; "I am young and of strong constitution. I work hard, and if I had money enough to buy the *Reveil*, would I soon make out of it a first-class power and enrich myself."

"M. Bompain has a daughter," mused the notary aloud, as though he had not heard Jacques's remarks, "and I think he means to give her a million francs; but he is a Bonapartist."

"I would be a Bonapartist if it pleased him," answered Jacques Girard.

"And there is Grosgriel, whose daughter will possibly have a million too; but he is a MacMahonist."

"Political opinions will never weigh with me in the choice of a wife," replied Jacques mildly.

"Heigh! but I imagine the two young ladies I have named are some cuts above you," resumed M. Desgots, wagging his head. "If politics are no consideration, I would advise you to court Madlle. Pauline Madray, daughter of the manufacturer who has set up in that new factory on the quay. She is not very pretty, and her father is a Radical atheist, not many shades remote from a Communist; but she has fully three hundred thousand francs."

"I would rather marry Mdle. Bompain or Mdle. Grosgriel; but Mdle. Madray would do at a pinch, provided she be fairly young and agreeable."

"H'm!" said the notary, scrutinising Jacques, "you are wonderfully accommodating for a man of your age and parts."

"Not at all," replied Jacques Girard, with a stifled sigh; "I have my ideal, like others, but I cannot afford to run after it. I am ambitious, my dear M. Desgots, and have set my heart on becoming rich, and on becoming somebody, by all fair means and as speedily as possible."

These words of Jacques Girard's filled the notary with surprise. Accustomed to think that he was a judge of character, he had long ago classed Girard among the men of whom nothing need be said for good or ill. He had met him at parties, had once or twice had dealings with him incidentally to the insertion of some law reports in his newspaper, and had even advised him on a matter con-

nected with an inheritance of three thousand francs or so, which the sub-editor counted on receiving in the distant future ; but that such a man, without kith, kin, influence, or money, could be ambitious, had not entered the lawyer's mind.

Once he faced the fact that Jacques Girard desired to rise in the world, Master Desgots, who was no simpleton, conned over his client's advantages, and was fain to admit that youth, industry, blameless antecedents, and the esteem of one's fellow-citizens, constitute a capital which may well purchase a dower of 300,000 francs. Besides, Jacques Girard was a journalist, and journalism leads to everything. As owner and editor of the *Reveil du Coq*, Girard might aspire to municipal honours, become in due time sub-prefect, and perhaps something better. The will to succeed is everything in these cases.

So M. Desgots put on his hat, called on M. Bompain, and announced that he had an admirable son-in-law to propose, provided Mdlle. Bompain were not already engaged. The Bonapartist manufacturer listened, laughed, and sent the notary about his business. The same thing occurred with M. Grosgriel, saving that this worshipful mayor took it as an affront that a penniless quill-driver should be ambitious of marrying a young lady whose dower was sufficient to purchase a ducal coronet, and expressed his indignation with a grinning face. In sum, both the manufacturers had other views. They regarded their daughters as predestined to further the schemes of parental ambition, and each had in his mind's eye a most eligible son-in-law of achieved fame and position ; the one was an ex-Senator and general sixty years old, the other a toothless Duke of the Faubourg St. Germain, ruined in purse and health, but rich in ancestors.

The notary fell back upon M. Justin Madray, the Radical atheist, and here he was more successful. M. Madray did not rise at the bait, but he hovered round it, and the notary perceived that he might be hooked by a little judicious angling. A coarse, burly, and gruff-spoken personage was M. Madray, who had begun life as a common weaver, and adhered to the language, manners, and dress of mechanics, to prove that riches had not spoiled him. But though he wore velveteen, he had all the pride of a *parvenu* in wishing to be worshipped for his wealth, and he ostentatiously displayed his money in the gorgeousness of his household furniture, in the liveries of his servants, and in the showy attire wherewith he clothed his daughters. M. Madray's Radical atheism did not proceed from any very sincere conviction, but was part of the stock-in-trade as an enriched plebeian. Having no sort of culture (he could not spell, and never opened a book), he felt unfitted for decent society, and consequently pretended to despise it. He scoffed at princes, made salt jokes about priests, and vowed that he should be buried without any psalm-singing over his remains; but all the while his great object was to become popular, and to climb over the shoulders of the rabble to some pinnacle where he should be the peer of the mightiest.

M. Desgots, who knew the man, was aware that it would not suit him to have a titled son-in-law, even if such a one were procurable; on the other hand, Justin Madray was not demagogue enough to give his daughter to a mechanic. And so Jacques Girard appeared to be just the sort of half-and-half son-in-law that could be desired. The notary especially laid himself out to vaunt Jacques's sweetness of temper, which would prevent him from ever being otherwise than respectful and submissive towards his wife's father.

"Humph!" grumbled Justin Madray, evidently enticed

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by the proposal. "A journalist is not much to boast of ; it's a trade that requires no apprenticeship. However, this one is a well-looking lad, and you say he has many friends ?"

"Every one is his friend. There is not a man in Seine-bourg whose name stands on more visiting-lists. He would be a most useful ally to you"——

"I require no allies," interrupted the manufacturer bluntly. "I'm a self-made man, and if I wanted to reach any new goal I would fight my way to it alone."

"Of course, of course," rejoined M. Desgots.

"I want a son-in-law that shall have a long head and a civil tongue in it," continued the purse-proud Radical. "His head mustn't be too long, though, or he'd be crotchety, which is a plaguey defect in a young man. His head must be just long enough to teach him that I'm his master and like to be obeyed, since I can pay for obedience."

"Exactly so ; well, you will find Jacques Girard a man in all respects to your taste, and I am sure he will suit Mdlle. Pauline."

"Ah yes ; he must suit my daughter," exclaimed Justin Madray, as if this were a point he had overlooked. "I am not going to put any constraint on my daughter. You've seen Pauline, haven't you, Desgots ?—a pretty, modest, intelligent girl, and well behaved too, though I haven't had her brought up by nuns and priests."

"Mdlle. Pauline has all the virtues that can grace a maiden and give promise of perfection in a wife. I think it will be a most happy match ; and, to come back to the business side of the question, the three hundred thousand francs of Mdlle. Madray's portion would be an investment bearing good interest, for it would bring the young

people an income of about fifty thousand francs to start with."

The mention of 300,000 francs virtually arranged the matter, for M. Madray was in a position to give 500,000 francs to his daughter, and it was a consideration to be able to settle her for £8000 less. After all, 300,000 francs is not in excess of what a man may fairly claim with a wife when he has Jacques Girard's position; and on reflection the Radical thought himself very lucky to obtain such a son-in-law. Jacques was presented to the manufacturer, who invited him to dinner and introduced him to Pauline. At first sight the young people pleased each other, because neither had any characteristics or defects that repel, and because Mdle. Pauline, like most well-trained young French ladies, thought herself in duty bound to accept whatever husband her parents' choice dictated, without examining him too critically. The preliminaries of the marriage were soon concluded. There was some haggling about the dower, and M. Desgots thought good to hold out at the eleventh hour for 350,000 francs; but after the match had been within an ace of being broken off on account of this important difference the manufacturer wisely gave in, and the contract was signed. Within six weeks of Jacques Girard's matrimonial visit to the notary the wedding was happily solemnised, and the public learned at the same time that the bridegroom had become owner of the *Reveil du Coq*, and consequently ranked among the "big bonnets" of Seinebourg.

II.

This is not a narrative of Jacques Girard's married life, and consequently nothing need be said of his honeymoon. Pauline Girard was not pretty, but she was not ill-favoured,

and French grace rendered her attractive. She had an excellent temper, agreeable manners, and an art of conversing pleasantly. Jacques soon grew to like her; she reciprocated his affection, and gave proof of it by deferring to him in all things, so that whatever he said and did was well said and done.

This was satisfactory, and the uxorial encouragements which Jacques received whenever he chose to solicit them, emboldened him to start with a jaunty foot on the path of ambition which he had marked out for himself. It is to be noticed that when a man having a reputation for being content with little suddenly develops high aspirations, he generally does seek to climb extraordinarily high. Jacques furnished a new exemplification of the proverb that "still waters run deep." To the surprise of all his co-citizens, he dropped that hail-fellow-well-met demeanour which had made him such a universal favourite as a bachelor, and became reserved, not to say starched. He confided to somebody, who repeated it to some one else, by whom it was circulated through the city, that he saw no reason why he should not some day become a Deputy, and meantime he set himself to increasing the circulation and the power of the *Reveil* by applying for Prefectoral leave to transform it into a daily journal.

M. de Poignfermaye, the Prefect, was inclined to refuse permission. He was an energetic man, who, for all his high-handed ways, found it difficult to govern a manufacturing city where Republican sentiments largely predominated among the electors. His ambition was to coax, bully, or wheedle Seinebourg into returning a batch of Conservatives at the next general election, and he objected to strengthen an independent newspaper, which might baulk an achievement that would redound so much to his

credit. So long as his private organ, the "Ordre," was the only one to appear daily, it had a great advantage over the others; but M. de Poignfermaye knew but too well the allurements of Opposition journalism, and foresaw that if the *Reveil* came out every day it would carry away a large number of advertisers and readers from the Prefectural paper. On the whole, there was something which he did not like in this scheme for transforming a journal which had worked very well hitherto with three numbers a week. It is true the *Reveil* had become most moderate in its tone since Jacques Girard had succeeded to the management, but criticisms are not always the more welcome for being moderate, and there were disquieting rumours which represented Justin Madray's son-in-law as striving to become a somebody in the city which had seen him in such lowly circumstances.

Jacques Girard, however, contrived to force the Prefect's hand by a clever stroke of diplomacy. He sent his wife to beg the support of the Bishop. Pauline had been bred in antipathy towards priests, and had never spoken to one outside a church. The Bishop, on his side, was a little startled to receive a visit from the daughter of a notorious infidel. But the interview was not less smooth on these accounts.

"I shall be happy to further M. Girard's aims, madame," said the prelate amiably. "I accept the fact of your having solicited my good offices as an earnest that the *Reveil* will serve the interests of the Church."

"I suppose so," answered Pauline artlessly, as she admired the golden cross on the Bishop's breast.

"Our Church has need of friends, for it has many enemies in this city," continued the Bishop. "There is M. Grosriel, the Mayor, for instance, who, although

nominally a believer, has caused us much grief by appointing a Voltairian teacher to the Communal School. The *Reveil* should point out the impropriety of that appointment."

"I hope it will," was Pauline's reply, given in perfect good faith, for she did not know what "Voltairian" signified.

"And M. Girard would perform a pious act in inveighing with more explicitness than his journal has done as yet against civil marriages and burials."

"I am sure he will be happy to oblige your Grandeur in any way," answered Pauline, puzzled.

The Bishop continued to dilate on one or two more ecclesiastical grievances, then lightly glided on to the question of Pauline's own religious belief, exhorted her paternally to be devout, and dismissed her happy and rather touched by a general invitation to attend his Sunday receptions. Meantime Jacques Girard had gone to call on M. Grosgriel, the Mayor, who had erst been amazed at his impudence for aspiring to marry Mdlle. Grosgriel. Times being altered, M. Grosgriel was altered too. Jacques Girard was now a man of influence, and the Mayor—a sleek and wheezy but shrewd person—thought it prudent to be civil to him.

"My dear Girard, I will say what you please to the Prefect. For my part, I think that it would be a great boon were the *Reveil* to appear daily, especially if it stands up for the municipality against that busy Bishop of ours, who is for ever poking his finger into our pies."

"I do not think episcopal interference is called for in municipal affairs," observed Jacques Girard sagely.

"No, it isn't," puffed the Mayor. "I'm as good a Conservative and as staunch a Catholic as any man, but the

proper place for the priests is the inside of their churches, say I."

"And that is well said."

"You think so? I was always of opinion that you were not such a fool as you loo—ahem! But I was going to add that there has been an unpleasant tiff between the Bishop and me about the appointment of a school teacher. I am clearly in the right, and so the Prefect judges, but he dare not tell the *Ordre* to defend me, because you understand that a Government paper cannot belabour a bishop. That is why I should like the *Reveil* to take up the cudgels and hit his Grandeur hard."

"I will do my best," said Jacques cordially, as he rose to take leave.

"And you're a good fellow," wheezed M. Grosgriel, slapping him on the shoulder. "I always felt I could rely on you, and I may give you a proof of my confidence some day by asking you to render me some other service. Good-day. I will write to the Prefect this afternoon. I hope Madame Girard is quite well? You must bring her to my wife's parties."

That same afternoon, indeed, M. Grosgriel and the Bishop both wrote to M. de Poignfermaye, who did not feel equal to resisting the supplications of two dignitaries so eminent, and accordingly Jacques Girard obtained the leave he wanted. Unfortunately, the Prefect's permission was not wholly sufficient, for Seinebourg stood in one of the forty departments that were placed under the state of siege during the war, and which were still nominally besieged four years later. It was necessary to send a petition to General de Flamberge-Auvent, who commanded the military forces of the district, and who had it in his power to deal arbitrarily with all that concerned newspapers. Hearing that M. de

Flamberge-Auvent was the identical general who had been betrothed to the daughter of M. Bompain, the wealthy Bonapartist manufacturer, Jacques went to the latter and besought him to propitiate the General. M. Bompain was a tall thin man, who had himself been an officer before he had taken to fabricating shoddy, and who had conserved a soldierly frankness of speech, tempered only by the courtesy of the man of the world.

"I think I can answer for the General not hindering you, my dear Girard," he said patronisingly; "only you will do me a real favour if you pitch as frequently as possible into that ass Grosgriel. I never pass by the Town House without fancying I am still Mayor; and when I see that noodle's name on the notice board my blood boils. *Sacrebleu!*"

"I can quite sympathise with your chagrin, but your own turn will come again."

"Under Napoleon IV.—I hope so! By the by, I need scarcely hint to you that the General is at heart an Imperialist, so that you will not gain much if you join in the rant against the exiled dynasty."

"I will try to avoid ranting."

"Do so for your own sake. Your best chance of selling your paper well is to make it fly under our colours, for we are the strongest party, as you will see at the next plébiscite. Good-day. How is Madame Girard? You must bring her to Madame Bompain's parties."

It was thus that Jacques Girard contrived the aggrandisement of his paper. He increased its size without adding to its price, made a stirring appeal to advertisers, indited an opening article promising support to all just causes, after the manner of editors all the world over when they launch the first number of a new venture, and recruited

several new writers of versatility to adorn his staff. The *Reveil*, thus renovated, proved a genuine success. It was not virulent, nor even vehement, but it was amusing and well informed. It soon eclipsed its pair of rivals, became the paper which the Seinebourgeois most loved to read at absinthe hour, and gradually extended its influence beyond the confines of the department.

III

A French journalist is a man of weight. It may be alleged that his regard for facts is small, that his judgments on men and things have more variety of range than depth, that his temper often gets the better of him, and that, in his ardent desire that the world should be moved by his prose, he breaks out into paradoxes well calculated to bewilder the weak minds who look to the press for guidance. It may be urged that the French journalist is not over-scrupulous nor over-wise—that he prefers the discomfiture of a foe to the triumph of a principle, and that he would never miss a point to save a truth. It may be asserted that he is, socially speaking, bumptious and truculent, for that it is impossible to enter a drawing-room where he may happen to be without being at once made aware of his presence and abashed by it, so impetuous is his flood of talk, so dogmatic his observations, so jaunty his strut, so wholly self-satisfied the expression of his countenance. All this may be said and more; still the fact remains that the journalist is a power, and one whom men dread. Be he never so young and ignorant—and ignorant he almost invariably is, whether young or not—people truckle to him. He has usurped the public homage and the public fear that

were once bestowed on astrologers and court fools, but his resemblance to the jester is greater than to the astrologer, for whereas the popular belief in his divining powers may be limited, none can doubt his prerogative to stab reputations irresponsibly under cover of his profession. The French press laws, which have done so much to keep newspapers in terror of Government, have left them almost absolutely free to molest private persons. People may challenge the journalist if they dare, or thrash him if they can, but except for the fear of sword-thrusts or cane-wheals the man plies his vocation uncontrolled, and may use his pen indifferently either as a weapon to puncture with or as an instrument to bespatter. Nothing exceeds the power of the French journalist, unless it be his malice in using it, and his conceit in boasting of it. He is a strange excrescence on the surface of modern civilisation—a bramble, briar, or stinging-nettle; and no wonder that people should handle him tenderly, for he is harmful by nature. A statesman enters a drawing-room, brushes unceremoniously past officers who have bled and grizzled in their country's service, philosophers who have grown grey in promoting science, painters, composers, and poets whose works have added to the nation's glory; but he stops before a puny young man with an eye-glass and a pretentious head of hair, and bows affably to him. A few months before, that puny young man was a puny clerk in the statesman's office, but having deserted his high stool and desk to write in a newspaper of large circulation, it is now in his power to render his old chief ridiculous in the eyes of 50,000 readers by assailing him every morning with barbed jokes and spiteful insinuations. Thus were the Sophists of ancient Rome a terror and a plague to the great and the wise; but the voices of the Sophists reached no further than the Forum's

limits, whereas that of the journalist rings in the ears of the million.

The *Reveil du Coq* was no sooner well launched as a daily journal than Jacques Girard began to find that he had added a cubit to his stature. He might have been feared and worshipped had he pleased at the time when he worked as a sub-editor under Pierre Barcol, but his object in those days had been to make himself friends of the sort who render life pleasant by inviting one to dinner, and he had rather overstepped his aim, for, hurting no man, no man had considered him worth much attention. As has been already said, he did not at once alter the tone of the *Reveil* when it had become his for good, for he attached himself rather to making the paper amusing; and when he dealt with serious topics, political or other, couched his remarks in such wise as to avoid giving offence to anybody; but people paid their court to him, nevertheless, for they now discerned in him the potentiality of inflicting hurt. They were not wrong, for events soon forced Jacques Girard to forsake his easy tactics of making things pleasant all round, and to introduce his paper combatively into the political arena.

One morning M. Grosgriel, the Mayor, arrived at Jacques's private residence with a hot face and invited him to breakfast.

"Come at once and take a chop at the restaurant," he gasped. "We'll talk over the matter there, and make arrangements."

"What matter? what arrangements?"

"Why, haven't you heard? Racot, one of the Deputies for the department, is dead, and there will soon be an election in Seinebourg. We can't get afield too soon in preparing my candidature."

"Your candidature?" and Jacques Girard glanced at the Mayor in such a way as to make his mouth open wide as an oyster.

"Why, yes; isn't it a settled thing?" exclaimed that official with surprise. "My candidature has the support of the Prefect and of all Government authorities."

"But I never gave myself out as a supporter of Government."

"Then whom on earth *do* you support? You're not going to remain neutral, I suppose?"

"No, assuredly not, but I must have time to consider," said Jacques, deeming it best to temporise. "Your announcement is quite sudden, and I have yet to learn the names of the other candidates."

"Oh, if that's all, you'll not be long in giving me the preference," answered M. Grosgriel, thinking that Jacques was only treating him to *journalée*, the mystic tongue in which editors envelop the hints that their services will be in proportion to the payment offered. "You'll see we shan't have any difficulty in coming to terms. You shall insert a leader for me every morning, and I will take five thousand copies daily for *gratis* distribution. If I get returned—as I must be with your paper and the *Ordre* both backing me—I will get you decorated. Mark my word."

"I will see what is to be done," replied Jacques, intimating by a gesture that he was busy, and should like to adjourn the interview.

"Oh, certainly; I can call for an answer to-morrow, Monsieur Girard," rejoined the Mayor, with a quaver of incipient misgiving in his voice. This was the first time he had addressed Girard as "Monsieur," and he added dismally, as he sidled towards the door, "Mind, above all

things, you beware of Bompain. He will make you bigger promises than I, but he won't keep them."

M. Bompain, in truth, lost no time in following M. Grosgriel on a canvassing visit to the *Reveil* office, and he promised mountains, adding broad hints that if Jacques Girard did not give to the Bonapartist cause the support that was requested, he would be noted in a black book from the day when the Imperial dynasty was restored, and never more have a claim to any State favour. Shortly afterwards a feminine emissary from the Bishop called on Pauline Girard (the Holy Church Catholic likes to entrust its most delicate diplomacies to ladies), and recommended to her pious consideration the merits of Count de Goupillon, the clerical candidate. His Grandeur the Bishop was not antagonistic to Government, but he could not conscientiously support a candidate such as M. Grosgriel, who had appointed a freethinker to teach reading and writing to little boys. Pauline was too much flattered by the civilities latterly vouchsafed to her by the Bishop not to be inclined to follow his episcopal behests, and with her mind chokeful of the virtues of Count de Goupillon she hastened into her husband's study, only to be confronted by her own father, who was in the act of announcing to Jacques Girard that it was he, Justin Madray, who should be Deputy for Seinebourg.

The old Radical was standing on the hearthrug, dressed in his greasy velveteens, and holding in one hand a battered felt hat, in the other a red cotton handkerchief, with which he mopped his oozing forehead. His eyebrows bristled in shaggy tufts, his lips were moist with the dram of white wine which he was accustomed to drink every morning "to kill the worm," and the excitement of the errand on which he had come had suffused his eyes with bloodshot streaks, making them gleam like a wolf's.

"I made your fortune, Jacques," he barked, rather than said, in a rasping voice, as he laid a horny hand on his relative's shoulder. "Now is the time to prove your gratitude. The *Progrès* will support me, for I shall stand forward on 'Red' principles, the only ones that will do nowadays, and you must point that out in the *Reveil*. Under a Republic, men must be prepared to go the whole hog."

"O papa! You a Deputy?" exclaimed Pauline, clasping her hands.

"Yes, my pet; your old papa, who started as a weaver at four francs a day, will become a Deputy!" cried Justin Madray, taking the words as an ejaculation of filial pride.

"No, it cannot be!" exclaimed Jacques Girard, seizing the dilemma nervously by the horns. "Everybody wants to become a Deputy nowadays, and a man in my position is bound to discriminate. I am deeply beholden to you, M. Madray, but public honour must go before private sentiments, and I don't approve your politics."

"Don't approve my—?" and the old Radical recoiled as if Jacques had in fun filliped a pellet into his face. "What ninny's song is that which you are singing to me, boy?"

"It's no ninny's song," replied Jacques doggedly. "It's a fact that you are an atheist and that I am not, and that you have a sneaking kindness for the Commune, which I abhor. I admire you for your consistency, but I shall admire you more if you remain faithful to your Liberal theories by leaving me free to oppose you according to my conscience."

"O papa! if you could only adopt the principles of Count de Goupillon!" interposed Pauline, frightened by the brutal wrath that was kindling in her father's eyes.

"Count de Goupillon? Ah! so the priests have been at

you and tainting you!" bellowed Justin Madray, glancing from his daughter to her husband with mingled fury and consternation. "I ought to have been prepared for this when you came whining to me for my daughter's dower—you and that insidious rogue Desgots! I shouldn't be surprised to hear that you were Jesuits in disguise, the pair of you!"

"All this is very painful, as well as unnecessary," retorted Jacques, clearing his throat as a prelude to the little speech which he desired to make, but which stuck in his wind-pipe somehow. "The Press is a sacerdotaly, and it is the function of the journalist to discriminate without fear or favour between the men who put forward theories to entice popular confidence. If I gave my support to you I should be showing favour; if I extended it to some other of the candidates who are about to issue addresses, I should seem to be evincing fear for men richer and more potent than myself. I will be above that suspicion—all my career through. I will place myself beyond the reproach of self-seeking. Disinterestedness and earnest zeal for the public good are the two maxims by which I intend to abide; and that being so, I will enter my protest against the unseemly multiplicity of candidates whose selfish contests are about to disgrace our city by coming forward myself as a candidate independent of party ties, and my newspaper shall champion my candidature, and mine only. . . ."

"Ah! then you are going to use my own money to try and cheat me out of my dues—out of the crowning reward of a life's honesty and diligence!" thundered Justin Madray, purple with rage. "Well, see here! I snap my fingers at you! I've kept money enough to fight single-handed, and I will fight and beat you—you'll see if I don't!"

"O Jacques! hadn't you better give in?" pleaded Pauline, beginning to cry.

"I? Never! There are occasions when a man must risk private and even public contumely for a patriotic object," answered Jacques, who was well pleased with his maiden attempt at a set speech. "Whichever candidate I supported I was bound to make myself three enemies, so I may as well make a fourth, and profit by the transaction."

"Yes, if profit were certain. But is it?" sighed Pauline dubiously.

IV.

It has been remarked that the French press-laws weigh heavily upon papers that assail the Government: this is especially true of the provincial journals, whether they belong to small towns or large cities. In Paris an Opposition sheet may go great lengths; in the provinces the length to which it may go depends wholly upon the caprice of the prefect—to whose caprice is superadded, under the state of siege system, that of the general commanding the district. Prefect and general can both deal with newspapers much as it suits them.

Now, M. de Poignfermaye and General de Flambergé-Auvent were both gentlemen who, to use the popular expression, did not like that mustard should be made to mount to their noses. Adepts in that particular kind of firmness which consists in bringing a foot down when a little finger will do, they ruled over their departments by a continuous series of ukases, abolishing this or that, or putting down somebody. It was the Prefect's delight to shut up clubs, to close cafés, under pretext that politics were talked there; to interdict annual village fairs, agri-

cultural dinners, or orpheonic contests because of the "ebullition of popular feeling" to which these solemnities might give rise; and every time he thus interfered with the business or amusements of the populations over whom he ruled, M. de Poignfermaye was wont to remind them that these are times when the principle of authority must be strenuously affirmed. One would have thought that the principle of authority was a something with a tangible form which there was danger of losing, and which it was expedient to exhibit as frequently as possible, just as the priests of old used to exhibit the relics deposited in their churches to prove that they had not dishonestly made away with them. The General, trumping the Prefect's lead, was for ever issuing orders of the day to his troops, commanding them to draw their swords and ply them unsparingly on civilian aggressors. His favourite phrase on such occasions was, "The army—our only bulwark against rapine of anarchy." It needed but a little stretch of imagination to picture anarchy as a murderous thief constantly prowling about Seinebourg in search of men's goods and lives. The only wonder is that the mothers of lower-class babes in Seinebourg did not frighten their refractory offspring with the name of anarchy, as that of a modern bogey more terrible than that which had scared them into good behaviour during their own childhood.

An election, it need hardly be remarked, offered M. de Poignfermaye and General de Flamberge-Auvent a golden opportunity for displaying their talents as governors. No sooner were the addresses of the five candidates posted up on the dead walls of the city and

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adjacent villages, than the two high officials met together to concoct measures. M. de Poignfermaye had orders from Paris privately to support M. Grosgriel, the Mayor, but to remain ostensibly neutral because of the Bishop and Count de Goupillon, whom it was expedient not to offend. The General had no orders whatever, but he was naturally anxious for the triumph of M. Bompain, his prospective father-in-law, and regarding the latter's success as certain, provided only the Radical candidate could be disposed of, he was for launching immediate thunderbolts upon M. Justin Madray and the *Progrès*. M. Grosgriel and Count de Goupillon he did not fear, nor did he look upon Jacques Girard's chances as dangerous; on the other hand, the Prefect was more afraid of Jacques than of anybody.

"There is something about the man's address which I do not like at all," he said, scanning the document; "it says nothing that one can lay hold of. Girard announces himself as a moderate Republican and a supporter of MacMahon, which is unexceptionable in form, but in substance what a difference between Grosgriel's declaration—'a MacMahonist and a supporter of the moderate Republic'!"

"Ay, Grosgriel means, let the Republic go to the deuce provided MacMahon remains, and Girard means just the contrary."

"Girard is a deep fellow. What can have possessed him to stand against his own father-in-law?"

"H'm, the two are acting in collusion," growled the General. "Girard is making the running for the old one,

as they say on the turf. He is afraid to support him overtly, lest the *Reveil* should offend those of its readers who dread the *Progrès*."

The Prefect shrugged his shoulders and took up the last published copy of the *Progrès*. No crow's eye ever scanned the earth's surface more attentively for worms than M. de Poignfermaye's eye the columns of this journal to detect reprehensible matter therein. Before he had turned over the first page his features brightened and he snatched up a pen.

"Interdiction of the sale of the *Progrès* in the streets and railway stations," he wrote gleefully. "See here, General; these remarks on that passage of Justin Madray's address which advocates an amnesty for the Communist prisoners is clearly an apology for the Commune."

"Interdict, interdict!"* approved the General grimly. "The less newspapers we see flaunting about the town the better."

"I wish I could interdict the *Reveil* too," mused the Prefect; "but Girard won't let me catch him tripping."

"Watch and wait. I'll be on my guard too," answered the General, and hereon the two squeezed hands and separated.

"Watch and wait" was good advice, and with popular interest in the election swelling mountains high, so that even the coolest of editors must have felt his nerves tighten a little, it was impossible that Jacques should not

* A prefect could, until 1876, arbitrarily interdict the sale of a newspaper in public thoroughfares and railway stations; that is, prohibit its sale anywhere save at the publishing office and in booksellers' shops—always a great blow to the circulation.

fall a victim. The interdiction of the *Progrès* naturally stirred the bile of the editor of that sheet, who, afraid, however, to kick against Government, relieved his feelings by falling tooth and nail upon the *Reveil*, and reviling Jacques for opposing his own father-in-law. Jacques retorted, and the *Progrès* inveighed anew.

In France controversies of this sort never last long without gliding into personalities, and thus it befell that the *Progrès* editor having described Jacques as a mountebank, and Jacques having replied by calling his adversary a "godson of Marat," cartels were exchanged and a duel took place, in which Jacques Girard punctured his adversary near the collar-bone.

At ordinary times Jacques would not have been brought to trial for this breach of the peace until at least a month after its commission, but the chance of getting rid of an obnoxious adversary was one of which M. de Poignfermaye was not slow to take advantage. Acting at his instigation, the procurator-general issued his summons on a Tuesday, the day after the duel; on the Wednesday the juge d'instruction examined the parties and signed their committal; on the Friday Jacques was brought to trial and sentenced to a month's imprisonment, and on the Saturday a gendarme brought him the procurator's warrant to surrender in gaol that same evening before 6 P.M.

This was clearly a stretch of justice as well as a flagrant breach of judicial courtesy, for it is the custom to allow duellists and press offenders to surrender at will, or nearly so. Accordingly, in the prison cell, where he was locked up punctually at 6.15 as a first-class misdemeanant, Jacques penned a feeling leader, calling public attention to the un-

worthy manner in which he had been treated, and protesting, in the names of all Parliamentary candidates present and to come, against judicial interference in Parliamentary contests. The public were delighted with the article, and so was the Prefect, for it enabled him to deal with the *Reveil* as he had done with the *Progrès*, in the following decree :—

“ We, the Prefect of Seinebourg :

“ Considering that, in its issue of the 9th instant, the *Reveil du Coq*, in an article commencing with the words, ‘ On broad patriotic grounds,’ and ending with the words, ‘ a disgrace to this era of civilisation,’ did incite citizens to hatred and contempt of the Government and of the administration of justice, by alleging that the Procurator-General acted subserviently towards the Prefect by conducting a trial for misdemeanour with indecent haste ;

“ Considering that such insinuations cannot be suffered to pass with impunity, under pain of shaking the confidence which is felt by all right-thinking citizens in the tribunals of their country ;

“ Considering, further, that it is the duty of those to whom is committed the safeguarding of the principle of authority to watch that the press does not degenerate into a vehicle for fomenting disaffection ;

“ We decree :

“ Firstly,—The sale of the *Reveil du Coq* is interdicted in all public thoroughfares and railway stations throughout the Department.

“ Secondly,—The Commissioners of Police are charged with the execution of this decree.

“(Signed) DE POIGNFERMAYE,
Prefect.”

This piece of high-handedness was too much for Jacques,

who boiled over. A journalist can edit his paper whilst in prison, and Jacques, on the first spur of the moment, dashed off fifty lines in which he pelted the Prefect with some hard truths, and wound up by hitting to right and left upon Government generally. He would have done well to put this effusion under his pillow, and to peruse it afresh in the cool of the morning before sending it to the printing-office; for, having neglected this precaution, he brought himself under the notice of General de Flamberge-Auvent, who made no bones about the matter, but, by virtue of the privilege which he possessed (and which the Prefect did not possess) under the state of siege, suspended the *Reveil* for a fortnight.

It was Pauline who brought the suspension decree to her husband, when she came as usual in the morning to visit him in prison. She wept, and threw her arms round his neck :—

“Oh, Paul, your ambition, dearest—great and noble as it is—will bring ruin on us all! Had you not better desist?”

“Desist? Never!” cried Paul, grinding his teeth as he disengaged himself; but the next minute his courage fell, for he thought of the pecuniary consequences of the fortnight’s suspension. By a stroke of the pen the General had fined him nearly 30,000 francs—a great sum for a man who reckons his income at 50,000, especially as Jacques had been put to huge expense in transforming the *Reveil* into a daily paper.

Pauline watched her husband bite his lips and make a gesture as though he would tear out his hair in bunches. She quickly nestled to his side.

"Jacques, dearest, you won't be angry, but I called on the Bishop this morning, and he will undertake to get the suspension cancelled if you will withdraw your candidature and support Count de Goupillon."

"Oh, my candidature is dished, I suppose, now," moaned Jacques. "There is only a month between now and the election, and the next fortnight, which I should have employed in canvassing, will be clean thrown away. But how can I, after giving myself out as a Republican, support Count de Goupillon, a Legitimist and a Jesuit?"

"You might say you had changed your mind," answered Pauline innocently.

"I think M. Bompain is the more likely man to get the suspension cancelled, and I shouldn't so much mind supporting him," exclaimed Jacques desperately, after a few moments' reflection. "Bonapartists and Republicans have several points of affinity, for both appeal to the democracy, and, besides, M. Bompain does not object to the Marshal."

"Shall I call on M. Bompain?" asked Pauline, rising with a woman's bravery to be gone at once.

"No. Well, after all, yes, you may. It looks like making a traffic of one's dignity, but I don't see why I should lose my election and my money to please a jolter-headed general. We will revenge ourselves on the old booby by bleeding his intended father-in-law. M. Bompain must pay us the costs of two days' suspension, and take five thousand copies a day as Grosgriel proposed to do."

Pauline was off in an instant, and before the afternoon was spent returned with an affirmative answer on M. Bompain's part. But in the meantime Grosgriel, having

got wind that Jacques Girard was relenting, hurried to the prison with much better terms. He too would get the suspension cancelled, but by the War Office, through the Prefect and the Minister of the Interior. He would furthermore cover the losses already incurred by the suspension, buy 10,000 copies a day until the election, and, to crown all, he would use his influence to get Jacques liberated from prison, nominally on a doctor's certificate of ill health.

This last bait turned the balance. When Pauline arrived with good news from Bompain, Jacques had already pledged himself to Grosgriel. It was too late, however, to apprise Bompain of the change, and this is what happened:—Bompain, having called on his future son-in-law at five, spent an hour in inducing him to cancel his decree, on the ground that the editor, having expressed contrition, the General would make allowance for the excitement of election time, and for the nervous agitation brought on by imprisonment, and be merciful. The General by no means liked being merciful, but he ended by surrendering, and the cancellation duly appeared in next morning's *Ordre*. On the following day the *Ordre* published a new Prefectoral decree, restoring to the *Reveil* the privilege of sale in the streets, and simultaneously this interesting journal reappeared with three columns advocating, not the candidature of M. Bompain, but that of M. Mayor Grosgriel.

Hereat the wrath of General de Flamberge-Auvent was kindled. He buckled on his sword and drove to the Prefecture.

"My dear Poignfermaye, there is some confounded

breach of contract here!" he cried, bursting into the Prefect's study. "I had arranged with Girard that he should support my relative Bompain."

"You had no right to make such an arrangement, my dear General. Soldiers mustn't touch politics."

"Must or mustn't, I did it! and if the *Reveil du Coq* does not hoist new colours I'll be down upon it!"

"I must ask you not to touch the *Reveil*," said the Prefect with bland firmness. "Until further notice, it is to all intents a Government paper, upholding the candidate of the Home Office."

"Home Office be ——! Let that beggarly journalist look to himself!"

"My dear General, you wouldn't like me to report you to Paris as an agent of Chislehurst?"

The General scowled and turned tail, but he was not beaten. From that day he and the Prefect were at secret war, and Jacques Girard was destined to bear the consequences. M. de Poignfermaye had at heart long cherished a grudge against the General, whose authority overshadowed his own in the department, and he thought that a good occasion for undermining his rival's prestige by making public divers abuses connected with M. de Flamberge-Auvent's military administration. Only not daring to print these attacks in the Prefectural journal, he caused them to be inserted in the *Reveil*, the which, whilst championing the Government candidate, M. Grosriel began to teem with articles upon the condition of the army, the indiscipline of General d'Auvent's division, the immorality of the soldiery garrisoned at Seinebourg, and so forth. The result of all this was a thunder-clap which

neither the Prefect nor Jacques Girard, poor fellow, could have foreseen.

General de Flamberge-Auvent went to Paris and saw the War Minister.

"A trumpety journalist is maligning me with the sanction of the Prefect, your Excellency," he said excitedly.

"That is bad," said the Minister frowning.

"It is a state of things that must cease," continued the General with warmth; "either he or I must retire."

"H'm! M. de Poignfermaye is a zealous servant," remarked the Minister. "I think the best way will be to transfer him to some other locality. I will speak to the Minister of the Interior about it. As to that journalist"—and here the Minister cast an eye over the incriminated articles—"as to that journalist, we must put him down. He's dangerous."

Put down the journalist? Of course, and nothing is easier.

At the time when he was just beginning to console himself for the collapse of his candidature by the favour of the Prefect and the brisk sale of his paper, Jacques Girard saw his office invaded one afternoon by a commissary of police and six gendarmes. The commissary bowed—for they are a civil race—and handed him this communication:—

"We, the General in Command of Seinebourg :

"Considering that the *Reveil du Coq*, in a series of articles, penned in a malicious spirit, has endeavoured to incite to hatred and contempt of the army, which is our sole national bulwark against the rapine of anarchy ;

"Considering that such attacks reflect disgrace on the press and can no longer be tolerated ;

"We decree :

"The *Reveil* is, by virtue of the state of siege, from this day suppressed.

"(Signed)

DE FLAMBERGE-AUVENT."

"Suppressed!" gasped Jacques in agony. "But I invested three hundred and fifty thousand francs in the newspaper, and I shall be ruined!"

"I would never invest money in newspapers," observed the commissary phlegmatically; "they are the most insecure kind of property. Gendarmes, remove all those papers."

Of course Jacques Girard lost his election as well as his paper; but he had at least the satisfaction of seeing his father-in-law returned in the Radical interest. M. Madray, mollified by his triumph, and yielding to his daughter's intercession, allowed the pair a trifle to live on; but he took a malicious pleasure in poking heavy jokes at the poor journalist, complimenting him ironically on the speed with which he had run through Pauline's dower.

JUSTIN VITALI'S CLIENT.

JUSTIN VITALI'S CLIENT:

A FRENCH "CAUSE CÉLÈBRE."



I.

A MAN on whose prospects success seemed to shine most sunnily was Justin Vitali, of the Bar of M—. At the age of thirty he had already achieved a reputation as a learned lawyer and an eloquent pleader. Without influential connections to help him on—labouring under the drawback of being a Corsican, which is not a title of merit in the eyes of French barristers who dislike the politics of their insular brethren, addicted, moreover, to solitary study which kept him from chumming with his fellows or going out into society and making friends of the sort who often do more for a barrister than professional merit does, Justin Vitali had, nevertheless, attracted attention much quicker than if he had had recourse to ambitious arts. He was just the sort of man whom solicitors appreciate. He had the gift of listening. It has been said that conversation has become a lost art in these our times because every man reflects on what he shall answer instead of paying attention to what he

hears ; Vitali, on the contrary, hearkened with all his ears, and his memory was so retentive that he often surprised a client by reminding him of a cursory remark which had been uttered without any intention that it should be remembered. It was a maxim of his that the merits of a case are ascertained less by what a client says than by what he lets slip ; and he had a tact for drawing on a speaker to be communicative by an appearance of tacitly acquiescing in all his observations. This power of concentrated attention brought to bear on the reading of his briefs lent Vitali the force which an advocate must needs acquire who speaks with a full knowledge of his case, and it made him a dangerous opponent for leading barristers of large practice who went into court having but skimmed their briefs. It got to be said that when eminent counsel knew they were to be pitted against Justin Vitali, they took care to master their facts and charged a heavier fee for the trouble. But, though other barristers might by fits and starts emulate the Corsican's industry, few could compete with the inborn gifts which made him an orator. He was a muscular man of middle height, with a swarthy complexion, black hair, which he wore long and brushed off his high forehead without any parting, thick black whiskers trimmed short, and dark eyes, large and piercing. In his ordinary attire he might have been taken for a provincial farmer in Sunday dress, for he wore ill-cut baggy clothes of rough cloth, and was not careful about dusting them ; but in court his gown and cambric fall became him well, and as soon as he had put them on he was another man. In this atmosphere of justice, which was his real sphere, he thawed ; the cold expression of his features gave place to a look of ardent

interest in all that was going on ; he would turn his eyes with prompt, inquiring flashes on judges, witnesses, and on the jury if it were a criminal case ; and casual spectators, who did not know his ways, might have thought that he was continually tempted to spring on to his legs before the time. But this excitement was only outward, for when Vitali rose to speak his impulses were always under his control ; they were like a steam machine which a child's hand can guide. He despised tricks of rhetoric, declamatory gestures, and sensational phrases, his eloquence being the natural outpouring of a full mind and heart, flowing like a torrent from a subterraneous lake. He had a clear and melodious voice ; his gestures were few and graceful, and his Corsican imagination tinged his speeches with a warm colouring, with happy metaphors and with occasional beauties of true poetical pathos, more especially when he was pleading in cases in which his own sensibilities were stirred.

This very frequently happened, for Vitali had laid down for himself a singular rule of conscience:—he would plead no causes which he did not sincerely believe to be just. A well-known Scotch professor of jurisprudence being asked to deal with the question as to whether an advocate were justified in pleading iniquitous causes, answered, that a counsel is a mouthpiece, not a judge, and that it is merely his function to place his client's case before the bench in the manner in which the client himself would have stated it had he possessed the requisite oratorical ability and legal knowledge. Vitali took a different view of an advocate's duties, and contended that a man has no right to place his talents and his learning at the service of a person who is

endeavouring to do a wrong. "As well," said he, "might a locksmith argue that he was justified in aiding a burglar to break into a house so long as he took no share in the proceeds of the robbery." And on another occasion, smiling at somebody who had styled barristers "the defenders of the widow and the orphan," he replied drily, "Yes, but if some barristers defend the widow and orphan, it is presumably because others attack them; therefore the Bar contains as many assailants as champions of the widow and orphan." Often when he had read a brief through, Vitali returned it with a note to the effect that he thought the cause untenable. And once or twice he had appended some words of critical advice which proved most unwelcome to the suitors who had wished to retain him. Had he been less laborious or able, or less successful in winning the causes which he did undertake, his hyper-scrupulousness would have blighted his professional prospects. As it was, solicitors gave him a character for eccentricity, and, while praising him aloud, thanked Heaven in secret that there were not more like him.

But Vitali had also made himself numerous enemies, for it was not to be expected that a man should set up a rigid moral principle without seriously offending many worthy people who were less rigid. All the suitors whom Vitali had snubbed spoke with wrathful contempt of his pretended integrity, deriding it as the affectation of a hypocritical character; and from *esprit de corps* the Corsican's fellow-barristers concurred. After all, they were as good as he. Did he imagine, forsooth, that *they* pleaded unrighteously, that *they* had no principles, that *they* would let the temptation of a heavy retaining fee sway their sensitive con-

sciences? Although M—— is a large maritime city of nearly half a million inhabitants, its society is thoroughly provincial, and everybody there knows or believes he knows everybody else. It came to be rumoured that Justin Vitali's "bearishness" was due to his having been crossed in love; others discovered that his real name was Vitali della Sebbia, but that he had dropped his aristocratical patronymic because he was the son of a fraudulent bankrupt, who had hanged himself to escape the hulks; others felt sure that Vitali would turn out to have been a secret agent of the Jesuits, and they begged the rest to mark their words. In short, envy, being unable to deny the Corsican's talent, went to work dropping fly-spots on his reputation or his motives; but this did not prevent Vitali from increasing in credit among suitors day by day; for suitors, like patients, will run to the man who can bring them speediest relief, and there is no relief in law like a good verdict.

II.

At the moment when this tale opens Justin Vitali had just been pleading a cause which was to set the seal to his renown. He had appeared as counsel for an Opposition newspaper prosecuted by Government. The prosecution was unjust, but as there is no jury in press trials, the defendants had little justice to expect from three judges who, besides being ever anxious to serve Government, seemed to have the letter of the law on their side. Vitali took codes and precedents in hand, and proved that law as well as abstract equity were on the side of his clients; and he forced the bench to acquit on a legal technicality. No such thing had ever been seen in the annals of news-

paper trials in M——; and after the judges had delivered their finding in a densely-crowded court, which had become the scene of enthusiastic and tumultuous cheering, they grew afraid of their own work. The President of the tribunal, a shrewd old time-serving judge, repaired to a reception which the Prefect was holding that evening; so did the Deputy Procurator-General, for he was impatient to demonstrate that he had done his very utmost to get the journalists fined and sent to prison.

But they found the Prefect much less concerned about the failure of his prosecution than about Vitali's remarkable display of eloquence and legal acumen. He was a Bonapartist, who served the Republic grudgingly, and hoped perseveringly for a restoration of the Third Empire, which might make a Cabinet Minister of him.

"What a speech!" he said musingly to the President; "a dismal pity that such an orator should belong to the Radicals."

"But M. Vitali is a Bonapartist, I believe," replied the President, glad to show that he and his assessors had not been worsted by a Republican.

"A Bonapartist—and yet he pleads for the 'Reds'?"

"That is the failing of the man. He pleads for anybody—whom he thinks in the right."

"If he be a Bonapartist, he is a man to be taken up," exclaimed the Prefect eagerly, for he knew the President was also an Imperialist. "We might push him forward at the next election. He would be a wonderful recruit for our party, now that Rouher is ageing."

"H'm! he would give you a good deal of trouble. Independence is his hobby."

"Oh! as to that, I have known many an Aristides grow

tractable when a good berth was offered him," was the Prefect's confident answer. "The Procurator-Generalship of M—— is still vacant, and I'll see if I can't get Vitali appointed to it."

"He wouldn't accept," said the President with assurance. "So long as you pay a Procurator-General but 15,000 francs a year, the post isn't worth the consideration of a man of thirty in large practice."

"You leave the honour out of account," rejoined the Prefect. "Besides, the post would only be a stepping-stone to politics. At all events, we can try."

The Deputy-Procurator, who was approaching, and overheard the Prefect's remarks, pulled a wry face. He had set influences at work to obtain the Procuratorship for himself, and he lost no time in leaving the party to go and telegraph to his friends in Paris to bestir themselves.

Meanwhile Justin Vitali, exhausted by his long and intricate speech in court, had returned to his chambers. They were poorly furnished rooms, whose chief luxury was the library of well-bound law books, which every French advocate is bound to possess before he can be admitted to the Bar. Prior to sitting down to the frugal dinner which was sent him every day from a cookshop, Vitali went up to his writing-table, which groaned under a weight of papers, and began this letter :—

"MY DEARLY-LOVED MOTHER,

"To-morrow's newspapers will carry you the report of a trial which has been my greatest success, and which will, I trust, definitely consolidate my position. My earnings are steadily on the increase, and I have little doubt now that after

five years more of patient work, favoured by the luck which has hitherto befriended me, I shall be able to pay off my poor father's debts and clear his memory of the stain which was so maliciously and wrongfully thrown upon it. Towards this end, on which we have both set our hearts, you may rely that I shall not cease to strive, to the exclusion of every other hope or ambition——"

He had got so far when there was a ring at the door of his chambers, and his servant entered with a card, saying that a lady desired to see M. Vitali at once.

"A lady at this hour? Did you ask her business?" said Vitali, as he glanced at the card, on which was the name "*Madame Desplans.*"

"She is a young person, sir, and she says she will not detain you above an hour," said the servant.

"An hour; that is at least frank: they generally say 'not above five minutes,'" remarked Vitali with a weary smile. "Inquire whether the business is so urgent that the lady cannot fix an appointment."

"She seemed very anxious to see you, sir," rejoined the man, and he opened the door to go out; but at this moment a lady dressed in deep mourning suddenly glided past him and entered the room.

The shade over the table lamp kept the light down, and rendered it difficult to discern the visitor's features. But it was evident that she was young, slight of stature, and, judging by the quality of her apparel and her gracefully dignified carriage, a person accustomed to good society. She walked straight up to Vitali's table without speaking. He rose astonished, but bowing, and offered her a seat; and it was only when the servant had retired that she

addressed him in a musical voice of great vivacity, and rendered slightly tremulous by excitement.

"Excuse me for intruding upon you, M. Vitali, but I wish you to appear for me in a lawsuit. I received notice this morning of an unworthy action that is to be brought against me, and nobody was ever so shamefully abused as I am in that paper. Here it is in my pocket, and I will leave it with you. When I got it at ten o'clock I cried for an hour; but my maid told me I had better come to you who are so famous, so I went to the courts, but you were speaking in that newspaper case, and when it was over I could not get near you because of the throng of persons who were applauding you. I applauded like the rest, for I assure you you were very eloquent, and it occurred to me that if you could find so many things to say for a journalist, you would speak still better in defence of a lonely persecuted woman."

"The suit is about a will," interrupted Vitali politely, for he was proof against compliments. "Allow me to glance at the paper. H'm! mercenary acts, wiles. It appears the plaintiffs wish to have the testator's will annulled on the ground of"—

"Yes, on the ground that I used undue influence!" exclaimed Madame Desplans. "Did you ever hear of such a thing? Why the money in question was bequeathed me by a man who at least twenty times offered to marry me; and who might have been alive now if I had given him my hand! But I won't waste your time in exclamations; here are the bare facts. I was left an orphan at twelve, and at eighteen was married to a retired naval officer, who had been a great friend of my father. Captain Desplans, though much older

than, I, was a most affectionate husband, and we lived happily together for four years—until the Captain, having embarked all his fortune in a speculation, was ruined. The blow preyed greatly on his mind because of me. During a few months he tried hard to find employment, but his age for active work was past, so that he fell ill of despair and very soon died, leaving me unprovided for."

"You were absolutely destitute?" asked Vitali, who continued to glance at the notice of process.

"I had just ten thousand francs and my jewels."

"And no relatives or friends to give you a home?"

"No relatives at all," said Madame Desplans, shaking her head; "but I had one friend, Captain Lacroix, who had formerly been Lieutenant on board my husband's ship, and who is the person mentioned in that document. It is he who left me the property in dispute, and whose mourning I am wearing. And oh, when I think that those selfish relatives of his, who never once came near him in his illness, and who had done all they could to make his life wretched—when I think that they dare to accuse me of having been mercenary, false, depraved, and everything that's wicked, it's too much to bear: oh, oh!" and the young widow burst into tears.

"Console yourself, madam," said Vitali gently: "these law papers are often drawn up in brutal terms; but if the charges brought against you be false, there will be so much the more dishonour for your accusers."

"False, why of course they are false; can you doubt it?" ejaculated Madame Desplans, looking up as if the merest hesitation were an outrage on her. "Why, I devoted myself to Captain Lacroix, and spent six months

nursing him, when, as I have told you, I might have become his wife if I had pleased, and have inherited the whole of his property instead of the half which he left me. He was about forty years old when I first became acquainted with him, that is some six years younger than my husband. He frequently visited at our house, and I was not long in perceiving that he cherished a deep attachment towards me. He ended by declaring himself, and I ordered him not to let me see his face again, threatening if he returned to our house I would inform my husband of his conduct. He did go away and remained absent for two years; but so soon as my husband was dead he hastened back from Italy, where he was, and made me an offer of his hand. I felt no doubt that he sincerely loved me, but I was angry with him for his past behaviour; besides which, he was a man of passionate and morose temper, with whom I knew it would have been impossible for me to live happy."

"This paper says that he was almost imbecile from confirmed intemperance."

"He became that after I had rejected him," said Madame Desplans, drying her eyes. "I believe he had given way to drink during his two years' absence, but upon my telling him that I would never be his wife he appears to have abandoned himself altogether; so that one day I received a raving letter from him, in which he said that he was on his deathbed, that it was my cruelty that was killing him, but that I could restore him to life if I would go and see him and give him a word of hope. I confess that I was seized with terror, and with some remorse, for it is horrible to be told one is causing the death of a man whose only

crime is to have loved you too well. Consulting only my first impulse, I hastened to Captain Lacroix's house, thinking that I would only stay there a few days to nurse him until he got well. But he lingered on for months, alternately lucid and delirious, but always quite incapable of taking care of himself, and in such a complete physical prostration that I awoke every morning with the conviction that he would be dead before night. When he did die at last, it was found that, by a will dated during the time while my husband was alive, he had left me half his fortune, that is a million francs, for he was a rich man, the son of a Marseilles merchant. Then it was that his relatives, who had left me to nurse him on his deathbed, fell upon me with that paper, in which they charge me with having circumvented the unhappy man, with having tried to cozen him into marrying me; indeed, they almost hint that when I found he would not yield to me, I ended by poisoning him, so as to become possessed of what he had left me the sooner. Ah, it is all too infamous, M. Vitali! Do I look like a scheming adventuress—do I look like a poisoner?"

She had half risen in uttering these words. Vitali lifted the lamp shade, and the light fell full on her features. No, it was not the face of an adventuress, nor of anything but what was sweet and good. She had large blue eyes, soft and candid as a child's, a tiny mouth which no falsehood could ever have defiled, and pale golden hair that seemed to crown her pure brow with an aureola of innocence like those on angels' heads. So at least thought Justin Vitali as his admiring gaze fell on the young face turned supplicatingly towards his. From that moment his destiny altered its course.

She had no need to continue clasping her hands as she did, for her cause was now right in his eyes, although all mankind should arise to accuse her. There was a look of protection in the glance he bent on her ; then something like timidity stole into it, and a sensation which he could not account for, but which made his heart beat, took sudden possession of him. He turned towards his desk, caught up a pen, and, to give himself a countenance, asked his visitor some desultory questions, her full names and address (her Christian name was Clotilde), whether she had a solicitor, what documents she could furnish to assist her defence, &c. All this time he felt nervous, and dared not look again at Madame Desplans. He stammered, and the consciousness that he was doing so made him redden : then he became aware that he was prolonging his questions with an inward purpose of preventing his visitor from going away—and this discovery filling him with confusion lest he should be detected, he said abruptly, by manner of closing the interview :—

"Your solicitor will have to instruct me in due form, Madame, but your case is happily not a difficult one. By the way, am I to understand that you are entirely dependent for support on Captain Lacroix's legacy?"

"Yes," answered the young widow artlessly ; "I brought my husband no dower, but though destitute, I probably should not have accepted the Captain's money if his relatives had behaved with common kindness to me. I knew nothing about his will till it was opened after his death, and I was more surprised than anybody to find that a million had been bequeathed to me. But now that I have been so basely slandered, I would maintain my rights at any cost,

even if I were bound to throw the million into the sea as soon as I got it."

"That is natural," answered Vitali, who was too much of a Corsican not to sympathise with the craving for revenge. "The legacy is but a just acknowledgment of your devotedness in tending the dying man—besides, I suppose the Captain was aware that your husband had been ruined."

"He was not only aware of it, but he was himself partially the author of our ruin, and that is just the point, for in his will he treats the legacy as a restitution," exclaimed Madame Desplans animatedly. "I should tell you that Captain Lacroix often advised my husband on pecuniary matters, and once he counselled him to invest in a mining company which had been started in Corsica."

"In Corsica!" exclaimed Vitali with a start, while a deep pallor of a sudden overspread his face.

"Yes; and the company soon went to ruin, for it had been founded by a dishonest banker—one Della Sebbia. But what is the matter, M. Vitali?—you look unwell."

"Della Sebbia was not dishonest, I solemnly vow," said Vitali, standing up and speaking with considerable emotion. "In founding the mining company, Madame, he sincerely believed that he was promoting a genuine enterprise, and when the ruin overtook him and his shareholders he committed suicide."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Madame Desplans, opening wide her blue eyes and assuming an air of contrition, "but I hope I have said nothing—was that M. Della Sebbia?"——

"He was my father," said Justin Vitali, whose brow contracted as in pain.

There was a moment's silence. The young widow had risen, and the Corsican and his client stood for a brief space close together with downcast faces, neither speaking. Madame Desplans broke the silence by saying, in a tone of compassion and regret—

"I am truly sorry, M. Vitali—I could not guess—but this will not prevent you from defending me, will it?"

"That is a question for yourself to decide," answered Vitali, a little bitterly. "But if you cannot believe in the honesty of the father, I would advise you not to submit your fortune and reputation to the care of the son."

"I will believe anything you tell me, M. Vitali," said Madame Desplans, without hesitation; then she added, with a half smile, "But, unintentionally as it may be, your father was the cause of our ruin. He was the cause that I am standing before you to-day; so you owe me a kind of reparation. Prevent me from being despoiled of Captain Lacroix's legacy, and we shall be quits."

III.

What momentous events may not happen between two paragraphs of a letter interrupted for an hour! When Vitali wrote to his mother that he would devote himself to clearing his father's memory "to the exclusion of all other objects or ambitions," he said what he meant: when he resumed his letter, this passage in it was no longer true. His filial piety had not lessened, but a new element of hopes and fears had entered his life. His main object at present was

to clear Clotilde Desplans ; and when he had done that, what then ? Here he asked himself with uneasiness why he should shrink from looking to the time when the professional relations between himself and the young widow should be at an end, and when perhaps she would go away and be never more seen of him. His life would become a cheerless blank again then, as it had been before she had come to him like a sunbeam into a prison cell. He had looked upon her, and it seemed to him that her face must for evermore remain shining before his mind's eyes.

When she had gone, he carefully read through the writ of process with which she had been served, and which, like all such documents in France, was a most elaborate indictment, covering several pages of stamped paper. The terms of it made his blood boil. Accustomed as he was to the calumnious malice of litigants, to the diabolical ingenuity with which a plaintiff's lawyer can pervert the meaning of the simplest acts and words so that they may be made to bear a felonious significance, Justin Vitali nevertheless thought that slander had never been pushed to greater length, and humanity, honour, decency, and common sense never been more outrageously set at defiance, than in this document, which accused Clotilde Desplans of being a false intriguer and swindler. He foresaw that the case would make an immense noise, for, in a country where women's influence is paramount, the public have a great interest in knowing what constitutes an exercise of *undue* influence ; then the magnitude of the sum at stake would lend importance to the suit, besides greatly heating the plaintiff's pleas, for Frenchmen do fight with exceeding desperation for a million francs.

All the other briefs which Vitali had in hand at this time lapsed into the background of his preoccupations ; and on the morrow of Madame Desplans' visit, it cost him real physical suffering to go into court and give his attention during three hours to a knotty insurance case. He had scarcely slept through the night from thinking of the extraordinary concourse of circumstances which had made him morally the debtor of Madame Desplans, whom his father had unwittingly ruined. He deemed it nobly generous of her to have said that if he won her suit she would consider they were quits ; and most magnanimous of her to have shown such readiness in believing in his father's innocence—a point upon which all the world, ay, his most intimate friends (with whom he had quarrelled on that account), remained sceptics. How could he for a moment mistrust the guiltlessness of one who displayed such confidence in him and his ? how could he help longing for the day when he should tear her name spotless as a jewel from the ignoble hands who sought to soil it, or help fretting at the inevitable delays which obliged her to remain under the cloud of foul aspersions for weeks at least, perhaps for months ?

In the luncheon interval of the insurance case, Vitali stayed in court and wrote Madame Desplans a letter, putting to her some questions which he had omitted to ask on the previous day, and adding some general remarks upon the conduct of her case, with the intention of reassuring her. He did not notice that this letter far exceeded in length and in style the usual manner of a business communication, but in all he said he wished to pave the way to an offer to place his purse at her disposal until the trial was ended. It had

occurred to him in the night that Madame Desplans' circumstances must be woefully straitened, and that she possibly had not enough to live on in comfort for the next few weeks, setting aside the defrayal of expenses attendant upon the preliminaries of every lawsuit. He was wording his proposal with infinite delicacy, and bidding Madame Desplans to regard any loan she would accept as a simple advance on the fortune which she would shortly recover, when one of the most eminent *avoués* in Rouen crossed the court and touched his shoulder. It was M. Boidoux, to whom he had been indebted for many a brief.

"Vitali," said this solicitor, "I sent you a big brief yesterday, but don't go to work on it yet, for it will have to be amended, as the case is going to be transferred from a civil suit into a criminal action."

"Very well," replied Vitali, nodding absently. "I haven't yet looked at yesterday's briefs. Who are the parties to this one?"

"Heulard, Viel, and some others, *versus* Desplans, a young widow, and we are for the plaintiffs."

"What?" exclaimed the Corsican.

"You seem to have heard of the case," observed M. Boidoux, taking a pinch of snuff. "We thought at first we had to do merely with undue influence, but circumstances have come to light which show there was downright murder. Madame Desplans poisoned"—

"Who told you that?" ejaculated Vitali, with so energetic an expression of fury that M. Boidoux recoiled.

"Heigh! What dog has bitten you? You surely don't take an interest in the defendant?" he asked incredulously.

"I am retained for Madame Desplans, and I mean to go on with her case to the end," answered Vitali hotly.

"Oh no, that I am sure you won't!" replied M. Boidoux, wagging his grey head. "You'll drop her brief like a red coal, for I know you. I don't say but that it would have been a pretty case for you to fight, if there had been no proofs of murder, for, after all, what is undue influence in a pretty woman? Madame Boidoux used no undue influence on me before our marriage, but if she had asked me to convert all my fortune into golden marbles that she might play at ring-taw"——

"Come to the point, M. Boidoux, I beg," cried Vitali, shaking the lawyer's arm almost brutally. "What do you mean by proofs of murder?"

"Laudanum in the body," replied M. Boidoux positively. "At least we hope to find some there," he added, correcting himself. "Examining the deceased's papers the day before yesterday, we came upon letters in which he expressed fears that Madame Desplans was endeavouring to poison him. These letters had been written by him in bed; they had been put into envelopes, sealed, addressed, and stamped for posting, and it was evident that Madame Desplans had suppressed them. This set us instituting inquiries, and we ascertained that Madame Desplans had on a certain day purchased laudanum. Of course we applied forthwith to the Procurator for an order to have Captain Lacroix's body exhumed, and that is being done at this moment. As for Clotilde Desplans, she is in prison; we had her arrested last night."

Muttering a growl, and launching a fulminating glance at the lawyer, Vitali fled from the Court at the moment

Y

when all the parties to the insurance suit were returning to it.

He rushed across the Pleaders' Hall, flew down a staircase, and, with his gown streaming behind him, made for a courtyard leading to the prison-house. But on reaching the open air he sank discouraged on a stone bench. He recollected that it would be impossible for him to see Clotilde. In France a prisoner apprehended on a criminal charge is kept in solitary confinement (*au secret*) till the examination by the Juge d'Instruction is at an end ; and sometimes this examination lasts for months ! Vitali thought with a shudder of the agonies which the young widow was going to endure, debarred from all communications with the outer world, precluded from seeing any faces save those of her gaolers and of the examining magistrate, who day after day would torture her with insidious cross-questions intended to wring from her an avowal of guilt. Some strong men have been known to go mad under this protracted torment : how was a weak, impressionable woman likely to bear up against it ?

Vitali went back with aching head and heart to the Court, and pleaded for his client in the insurance case. It required a miracle of self-command to enable him to bring his mind to what he was doing, but the very force of his sorrow lent him an artificial strength, and though he spoke with a haggard face and an irritable manner, he won his suit. As he was leaving the court, Boidoux accosted him, looking triumphant.

"I told you how it would be. The *post-mortem* is over, and they have found laudanum in the body."

"I don't believe it," snarled Vitali.

"But come, man—when I tell you so ! The doctors say he took a dose fit to kill a family."

"Reason the more. He committed suicide."

"Ah, if you're going to plead that, it's another affair," said the lawyer. "But I warn you it will be uphill work ; we have a chain of evidence that is flawless."

"Look here, M. Boidoux ; have you ever yet known me plead for a criminal?" asked Vitali, halting and glaring at the old solicitor as if he would eat him.

"No, my dear fellow, but you're not infallible," said M. Boidoux, buttoning up his topcoat. "At any rate, the affair is going to make a pretty fuss. See, it's already in the papers," and he handed the Corsican an evening journal, in a conspicuous part of which was printed in large letters : "MYSTERIOUS POISONING CASE. ARREST OF THE MURDERESS."

IV.

The "Desplans Poisoning Case," as it was called, was destined to convulse not only the city of M——, but the whole of France. There happened to be no topic of engrossing interest before the public at that moment, and this tale of alleged crime came as a welcome prey for the popular tongues to feed on. The youth and beauty of the suspected murderess, her distinguished social status, the large sum which was supposed to have prompted the murder, all these features combined to invest the affair with a special attractiveness, so that in every place of public meeting throughout the country Madame Desplans and her doings supplanted discussions about politics, new comedies, and new fashions. As the doctrine of contempt

of court is unknown in France—at least in the English latter-day application of the same—the newspapers freely commented on the evidence that had come to light. All that could be raked up as to Madame Desplans' antecedents was broadly published; her portrait appeared in the illustrated papers (and a sweet portrait it was), and, under the form of *complaintes*, long-winded ballads descriptive of the crime were whined in the streets by itinerant singers. At first, public opinion was, as almost always happens, dead against the prisoner, but the publication of the portrait caused a reaction; and when it became known that Madame Desplans was to be defended by Justin Vitali, "whose voice had never been lifted up in an unjust cause," the country divided itself into two equal camps, the one largely composed of husbands, married women, and old maiden ladies, who trusted that the poisoner would be guillotined; the other made up of all gallant and romantic souls, who enthusiastically, nay, fanatically, proclaimed her innocence.

The theory of the prosecution, as regards the prisoner, was briefly summed up thus:—

Clotilde Desplans was a person of extravagant taste. Cold-hearted, wilful, fond of finery and generally frivolous, she had married Captain Desplans without concern for his old age, and solely because he was rich. Once married, her conduct had been flagrantly irregular. Captain Desplans had been obliged to forbid Captain Lacroix his house because the latter had made love to Clotilde; and soon Clotilde's reckless expenditure plunged her husband into pecuniary embarrassments, which he sought to override by injudicious speculations, and so ruined himself. From

this moment, averred the prosecution, Madame Desplans had formed the project of marrying Captain Lacroix ; and if no proof existed of her having poisoned her husband to compass this end, there existed a strong presumption that she had done so, and it was certain that Captain Lacroix had suspected her of this crime. This accounted for his having refused to marry her, though his love for her had been very great ; and also for his having addicted himself to drink in the grief which the knowledge of her infamous deed had caused him. It was not denied that during the closing months of his life Captain Lacroix's intellect had been deranged, and many of the letters he had written on his deathbed bore evident traces of insanity ; but the prosecution argued that though facts might be exaggerated in these letters, there was a substratum of truth in them, and that they must be taken in connection with the finding of poison in the deceased's body. Madame Desplans had hurried to Captain Lacroix's house immediately on his being bed-ridden, and from that moment she had allowed no one to approach him. She had discharged two out of his three servants, and these persons deposed to her having taken possession of the Captain's house as if she were mistress of it, to her having been imperious and quick tempered, and to her having required them to give up the keys of the Captain's plate cupboard, cellars, &c., which she constantly kept about her, with the keys of his desk, bureau, and of a safe that contained his valuables. The third servant, an old woman, who had remained with the Captain till his death, stated that Madame Desplans had nursed the Captain with great apparent kindness, but she confessed that when the two were alone together she had

often overheard the sick man's voice abusing Madame Desplans as a would-be murderess. Moreover, that Madame Desplans had ordered her—the servant—on no account to post any letters the Captain might write. A chemist deposed to Madame Desplans having bought laudanum at his shop; and the doctor who attended the sick man gave evidence that he died rather suddenly at a moment when a turn for the better had seemed to supervene in his condition. From this it was inferred that Madame Desplans had poisoned the Captain from fear that he would recover, and that when once restored to health he would cancel the testamentary dispositions he had made in her favour at the time whilst her husband was still alive, and whilst he—Lacroix—still deemed her worthy of his love. As a criminal indictment is never complete in France unless the remotest and least important circumstances in a prisoner's life are laid bare, the examining witness had summoned a former governess of Clotilde's to prove that the prisoner had as a child been headstrong and often unmanageable. A discharged maid swore to her having frequently quarrelled with her husband; a discharged valet of Captain Desplans' had heard her remark at a dinner-party that death by laudanum must be a pleasant death, which clearly pointed to a long preoccupation on the means of taking life, and to a suspicious acquaintance with the properties of poisons.

What Justin Vitali suffered whilst all these depositions and conjectures, some terrible, some absurd, came to him piece-meal through newspaper reports, it is impossible to describe. Weeks passed without his being admitted to see Madame Desplans. Her case was in the hands of M.

Ragot, a small wizen Juge d'Instruction, who would turn a prisoner over and over as a dog does a bone, and would not let him go so long as a scrap of secret remained to be torn off. This grim man being questioned one day by Vitali as to Madame Desplans' health, answered blandly that the prisoner was as well as could be expected, and that he had given orders that she should want for nothing in the way of comforts compatible with her position. Vitali, who had never spoken to Ragot before, felt that he was committing an imprudence in questioning him; but he could bear the suspense no longer, and he had indulged a furtive hope that he might be able to insinuate a word or two that would propitiate the judge in Clotilde's favour. But his first hints in this direction fell against M. Ragot like paper pellets against a stone wall. M. Ragot was duty incarnate. Though not above five feet high, he was a colossus in the science of worming facts out of a prisoner, and keeping his counsel about the same till the time came for their official publication. The French code, which invests a Juge d'Instruction with the most tremendous of powers—that of examining prisoners in secret, and committing or releasing them on his own sole uncontrolled responsibility—has reared a class of men astute as lynxes, silent as confessors. M. Ragot would not have whispered a secret to the coals on his fire for fear it should be spread by the smoke up the chimney. He confined himself to telling Vitali that his case was progressing "hopefully"—but "hopefully" in a Juge d'Instruction's mouth means that proofs of a crime are thickening, or that the prisoner is being successfully harried into self-accusation.

Vitali was fain to be patient. With no materials to work with other than those which had been supplied him by Madame Desplans in one short hour's interview, he had to construct a defensive theory of his own, but to do this cost him little trouble, for he considered his whole case to be clear as the noonday. Captain Lacroix was a madman labouring under that form of hallucination which doctors call the "delirium of persecution:" his fears of being poisoned were all a result of his mania, and nothing else. The two servants who testified to Clotilde's imperiousness were disreputable persons who had been discharged for misconduct, and who were now revenging themselves. The purchase of laudanum had probably been made at the sick man's own request, and to procure him sleep at nights—anyhow, the fact that Clotilde had openly bought it, giving her real name and address to the chemist, was irreconcilable with any theory of murder. The same might be said with regard to the suppression of the sick man's letters, and with respect to Clotilde's whole conduct throughout. Nothing was more natural than that she should prevent the wretched maniac's letters from being posted to spread alarm among his friends and make his insanity notorious; but if there had been intent to murder, she would not have allowed those letters to survive as evidences of her victim's suspicions. To this Madame Desplans' detractors answered that assassins have in all times been proverbial for their lack of foresight, which explains why they are so often found out; but Justin Vitali's retort was, that with this system of putting far-fetched constructions upon everything, there is not a person, however innocent, but might have guilt affixed on him.

Talk of pleading unjust causes!—where was Vitali's talk of abstract justice in the present case? If proof had been forthcoming that Clotilde Desplans had been seen to pour the poison into the patient's mouth, he would still have brought forward rebutting arguments. He had become morally deaf and blind to all pleas that did not tally with his deliberate convictions. He did not regard the theories of the prosecution as things to be reasoned with, but demolished.

So time wore on, and Vitali's chivalrous obstinacy and devotion to the cause of the suspected murderess came to be as much matters of public rumour as the details of the "murder" itself. Vitali's equals and rivals at the Bar of M—— laughed to see him "gone so mad," and rejoiced to think that after such an unbroken series of forensic successes he was at last going to run amuck, and probably cover himself with ridicule. But the younger barristers, who could not yet compete with the eminent Corsican advocate, and who were disposed to take him for their model, thought him sublime, and loudly declared their admiration. It was through them and the younger journalists at M—— that Vitali's fame was being trumpeted to all the corners of France. Formerly his celebrity had been purely local, but now there was not a city but was made aware of the renown he had earned by his peculiar conscientiousness; and however the trial might result, it seemed inevitable that the orator of M—— would be obliged in deference to his national popularity to forsake the provincial Bar for that of Paris, where a wider field of honours would be open to him. Already Parisian solicitors were writing to him to promise him their patronage in return for his.

It was at this juncture that Vitali received a sudden offer of the Procurator-Generalship at M——. His secret admirer, the Bonapartist Prefect, had not forgotten him, and had exercised his influence so diligently that the Minister of Justice had allowed him to sound the Corsican as to his willingness to become a Government servant. Before the Desplans case Vitali would have refused the offer on pecuniary grounds, for his duty towards his father's creditors compelled him to prefer money to honours; but it flashed upon him that if he became Procurator, the conduct of the prosecution against Madame Desplans would devolve upon him *ex-officio*. Now public prosecutors enjoy a good deal of latitude. They receive the commitment writs of the Juges d'Instruction, and it lies within their discretion to suspend proceedings on the ground that the evidence taken before the examining magistrate was insufficient. Or if the case be brought to trial, they can abandon the prosecution in court, declaring that the evidence they have heard has convinced them of the prisoner's innocence. It is not often that Procurators do this, and Vitali knew that the Deputy-Procurator of M——, who would have charge of the case if *he* had not, was one of those men who feel professionally bounden to assert a prisoner's guilt to the very end. It sickened him to think that this narrow-headed functionary would slaver the venom of his salaried animus on Clotilde's purity. He reflected that Clotilde would leave the court with a prouder head if her acquitment, instead of being wrung from the jury by a counsel's speech, were brought about by the Public Prosecutor abandoning the charge in the name of Society; and as for getting another advocate to take his

place as the prisoner's counsel, this matter gave him no uneasiness, for he modestly thought that any barrister of heart could defend Clotilde as well as he could. These considerations induced him to call on the Prefect and accept the proffered post.

"Ah, well done!" said the ruler of the Department, motioning him amicably to a seat. "We were in some dread that you would refuse; but remember that this appointment is only the first rung of the ladder which you can climb if you are willing. The elections are coming on, and I may tell you confidentially that if you like to stand in the Bonapartist interest——You *are* an Imperialist, I believe?"

"Yes," said Vitali, "and if I can be of any service to the cause, I shall be happy to requite the honour you have done me. But I will frankly tell you why I accept this post," and he proceeded to enounce his reasons—with an emotion in breathing Madame Desplans' name which would have struck any observer.

"Oh, oh!" said the Prefect, becoming grave, but speaking with a smile. "We all know of your partisanship in this celebrated cause, M. Vitali; but let me give you a friend's advice, and urge you to keep aloof from Madame Desplans' affairs on undertaking your new duties. Touching as it is to see you champion the suspected pr—lady—so warmly in a private capacity, it might greatly damage your public career if you began by occasioning a miscarriage of justice."

"But it would not be a miscarriage of justice!" exclaimed Vitali with animation. "Do you think I would defend Madame Desplans if I deemed her guilty? It is

because I would answer for her innocence with my head on the block that I long to set her free, and restore her fair fame as a public official speaking for my country."

"That is all very good," responded the Prefect, "but the world would not believe in so much impartiality."

"But they must be brought to believe it."

"My dear M. Vitali, when we cannot go against the stream, one had better swim with it."

"What! when that stream is bearing an innocent creature to infamy and death?"

"Come, come, you must really allow me to guide you," said the Prefect, with the good-humoured authority of an experienced statesman. "Recollect you are my protégé; I look to you running a very brilliant race, and we must not let you mar it at the start. So if you positively cannot refrain from being romantic and generous, I will have your appointment deferred till the trial is over."

"Ah, it would be no use to me then!" cried Vitali in despair. "It was for *her* I was going to accept, not for me."

He returned home in very low spirits. The Prefect's manifest conviction of Clotilde's guilt depressed him more than anything he had yet heard from other persons; and for the first time he began to contemplate the possibility of not being able to carry a verdict against public prejudice. Hitherto he had been buoyed up by the confidence that on going into court he would straightway break down the flimsy structure of the prosecution like a house of cards; but what if his eloquence failed?—what if the jury were stubborn, and closed their eyes to the light of truth that he would thrust before their faces? It chanced that for the

past few days there had been a lull in the newspaper comments on the Desplans case. Everything that could be said about the preliminaries of the affair had been said and mis-said, and the public were now taking a rest from conjecture in expectation of the impending final act of the drama. Gloomy presentiments and visions began to pass through Vitali's brain. He saw a densely packed court full of cruel faces, a bench of obstinate judges, a ruthless sentence pronounced amid a silence broken only by the sobs of an innocent prisoner ; then a public square with a machine rearing aloft two huge red posts and a knife, a fainting form dragged up the scaffold steps, and the roar of a surging multitude. It was evening, and he shivered. The noise of carts passing in the street under his windows suggested tumbrils, and the occasional voices of workmen and boys, singing, that heartless indifference of crowds who go their ways not caring for blood that has been shed, even though it cry to them from the stones.

A knock at his door roused Vitali from his reverie, and his servant came in with a letter. It bore the stamp of the Palace of Justice. The barrister's fingers trembled as he tore it open, and he scanned its contents, then staggered, raising his hand to his brow and uttering an awful moan as he read this :

"MY DEAR SIR,—The preliminary examination of Clotilde Desplans is at an end, and you will be free to visit her to confer about her defence every day dating from to-morrow. I feel some satisfaction in informing you that the prisoner has at length made a confession of her guilt.

"Pray accept the assurances of my regard,

"THOMAS RAGOT,

"Juge d'Instruction."

V.

French procedure, as it has been said, isolates a prisoner—cuts him off from all human succour, and leaves him alone with the official inquisitor as a fly with the spider. The Juge d'Instruction weaves a web of evidence round his victim, patiently, laboriously. There is no reason why he should hurry, for the longer time he takes so much the less chance will there be of the prisoner's escape, and it is the Judge's business to convict rather than to judge. When at last the web has been made so strong that not a thread is wanting—when the net seems to encompass the captive on all sides with its serried, symmetrical meshes—then the spider-magistrate opens the door to the counsel for the defence—and the fly—and says complacently, "Now break through my handiwork if you can !"

When he recovered from his first shock of horror, Vitali decided that Clotilde's confession could only have been wrung from her by moral torture. The tormentor's craft was not abolished when the rack and thumbscrews were done away with ; and now, as in old times, innocent persons have been known to plead guilty so as to escape from the sufferings of an endless inquisition. Vitali made no doubt that this was the case with Clotilde. His truly was the faith that removes mountains.

So early on the morrow as he could expect to gain admittance he repaired to the prison. It was ten o'clock, and the morning was bright and balmy, one of the sort that inspires hope. The dismal portals of the gaol opened to receive the advocate ; some soldiers lounging in the entrance yard stood aside respectfully and whispered his

name to each other, and a turnkey conducted him down a flagged passage into a small white-washed room furnished with a deal table, two rush-bottomed chairs, and a stove. This was the counsel's parlour. It looked pitifully bare, and the iron gate which closed it in lieu of a door (so as to admit of a gendarme's surveillance from without) brought back the minds of visitors implacably to the nature of the building in which they stood. But Justin Vitali forgot that it was a prison. At last, after weeks of anguish that had seemed like years, he was going to see again the woman whose image one brief interview had impressed so ineffaceably on his mind; and at the thought his heart beat like a schoolboy's. Five minutes passed. There were some light steps down the passage; a sister of mercy in black robe and large white-winged cap appeared at the gate, opened it noiselessly with a key at her girdle, and stood back a step while the prisoner entered, then drew the gate back again with a clanging snap and vanished. Vitali and Clotilde Desplans stood together alone.

The prisoner was dressed in a black merino with white collar and cuffs. She was wasted to thinness; her complexion was as wax, and her eyes, preternaturally enlarged, glistened with the fire of inward fever. She was but the shadow of the lovely, smartly dressed little woman who ten weeks previously had introduced herself so abruptly to Vitali; so that as the Corsican gazed at her his heart was moved to its depths, and a violent quivering of his lips spoke to the intensity of the emotion he felt. As for her, she scarcely seemed to recognise her defender. She had seen him but once, and apparently he had not been present in her thoughts night and day ever since, as she had been

in his. She looked at him sadly a moment, as if to ask on what errand he had come, then bowed to him with a sigh, and sank into a chair :

"It is you, M. Vitali," she murmured. "The sister did not tell me. I hope you have come to say that all this misery is going to end soon."

"Very soon, I trust," replied Vitali, in a broken voice, as he took the other chair. "I have come to confer with you about your defence."

"What is the use of defending me?" asked Clotilde, in a tone of utter weariness. "They will have it that I am guilty of murder, so I have ended by agreeing with them, in order that they may let me have peace."

"But everybody knows that a confession extorted by such means as have been brought to bear on you is worth nothing."

"Oh, isn't it? I am sorry for that," wailed Clotilde, putting up her hands before her eyes as if to shut out a hideous vision. "Anything is better than what I have gone through. To be insulted, threatened, and cross-questioned day after day—to have all the acts of my life twisted into crimes—to be brought to look upon the disinterred bodies of my husband and Captain Lacroix, and to be told that witness upon witness are swearing to my guilt.—Oh!"

"The fiends!" murmured Vitali, rising and pacing about the room.

"It wasn't kind of them," continued Clotilde plaintively, as she wrung her hands, "for they saw that I was weak and could not answer their ingenious charges. Whenever I opened my lips they told me I was telling untruths. They

believed discharged servants sooner than me. It seems I never did a good thing in my life, but have been wicked ever since I was born. Let them put me to death if they please, and the sooner the better, for they don't suppose I can ever forget these weeks of agony, and what they have left me of life is not worth keeping with such recollections."

"You shall not only live, but your innocence shall be proved spotless as snow!" exclaimed Vitali, whose voice was unsteady, and whose whole frame shook. "I will come to see you every day, Madame Desplans,—I am your friend—and will get you acquitted."

"Thank you for saying so—but why should you be my friend?" sighed Clotilde incredulously; "you don't know me. You must have the same opinion of me as the rest."

"Before God I believe that no purer woman than you ever trod this earth!" cried Vitali.

"Oh!" murmured Clotilde, and burying her face in her hands she leaned forward over the table and sobbed in a convulsion of grief that seemed as if it would send the soul from the frail body.

A gendarme was pacing to and fro in the flagged passage outside. His yellow baldric flashed before the gate and his sword clanked. The sunbeams that streamed through the grated window of the parlour touched the golden hair of the weeping sufferer with trembling rays as if caressing them, and Justin Vitali leaned against the wall with his arms folded, his face awry with anguish, and his lips murmuring silent prayers which God in heaven heard.

With an abrupt effort, shaking off the emotion which paralysed him, he applied himself to the urgent task of restoring hope to his client. She had sunk into the apathy

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when death appears as a blessed relief, and the idea of degradation attaching to a capital sentence had lost all significance in her eyes after the humiliation which she had already undergone. Vitali talked to her of the future without being able to provoke a spark of interest. He returned to the charge, and declared that almost all her countrymen believed in her innocence, and that she must show herself strong for the day when her justification should be made manifest. But all this failed to move her. At last, however, by a display of the strong interest which he himself took in her, and by bidding her answer to the best of her ability a series of questions he would put, he succeeded in making her dry her eyes and exert her memory, which sufficed momentarily to put despair aside.

"The laudanum which you bought, Madame Desplans, was, I need not ask, to procure the patient rest?"

"Yes; he ordered me to buy it. He used to take several drops at a time to make him sleep. I cannot conjecture whether he took an overdose by intention or accident; for I never suspected he had died by poison until I heard it said here."

"And those letters he wrote?"

"Oh, those letters! they have done nothing else but reproach me with not having posted them," sighed Clotilde wretchedly. "But it was by Captain Lacroix's orders, given me in moments when he was lucid, that I posted nothing that he wrote while the fits of mania were on him. If a single one of those letters had reached his relations, they would have come and shut him up in a madhouse, to get possession of his property. This he knew, and he used to implore me not to let his deranged state become known.

I was not aware of what was in the letters. I never opened them, but laid them aside, hoping always that the Captain would recover his reason, and would then destroy them himself. If I had burned his letters, he might have fancied after his cure that I had read them—that is, profited by his helpless condition to pry into his secrets."

"And you continued for months nursing Captain Lacroix, and bearing with all his paroxysms? You knew that he accused you of wishing to poison him?"

"Oh yes! When his hallucinations came, he used to call me murderess and thief: and sometimes he threw things at me. But these attacks never lasted long, and in his lucid intervals he would beseech me so piteously not to let him be shut up, that I had not the heart to hand him over to his friends. I continued hoping to the last."

"One question more," said Vitali, with moist eyes. "Those servants of Captain Lacroix whom you discharged had, I presume, misbehaved themselves?"

"Yes; there were a valet and a housemaid who I found were robbing him of his plate, clothes, wine, and of everything else they could smuggle out of the house. It was the Captain himself who told me to send them away, and to take possession of all his keys for him."

"Well, everything is exactly as I thought, Madame Desplans," exclaimed Vitali, in a sudden tone of confidence. "Rely on me—promise me to be trustful and hopeful."

Clotilde shook her head.

"I vow that you shall be acquitted," cried Vitali adjuringly. "I swear to heap confusion on the enemies who have foully traduced you, and to make you leave the

court with the respect and pity of all honest men and women showering upon your sweet saintly footsteps like flowers."

"Ah, if I could believe you!" ejaculated Clotilde, stirred by the Corsican's vehemence, and looking at him with eyes in which began to gleam a faint ray of hope.

"Do believe me!" implored Vitali, taking one of her small pale hands and pressing it between both his. "Is there nobody on earth whom you would care to live for—who would have joy in your acquittal—who?"——

"Don't!" exclaimed Clotilde, feverishly withdrawing her hand and abruptly starting back, panting, half wild. "Don't, M. Vitali, put these delusive hopes into my head if they are never to be realised. Will you swear to me that there is the least chance of my being acquitted?"

"There are a thousand chances—all chances are in favour of it!" protested Vitali ecstatically.

"Ah, then, save me! Yes, I implore you to save me!" cried Clotilde, seizing his hands and gazing upon him with impulsive supplication. "Ah yes, I want to live . . . for there *is* a man on earth whom I love. . . . I can trust you, M. Vitali, for you have said you are my friend—are you not? Well, I will tell you what I have told nobody else: the real reason that prevented me from marrying Captain Lacroix, though he so constantly implored me, was that I had plighted my troth to another man. You have never heard of him. His name is Henri de Barre, and he is a young engineer. He had no fortune, else he would have married me a year after my husband's death. So we agreed together that he should go to India, where he had a chance of earning a large sum of money in

railroad-cutting, and come back in two years to marry me. His term of absence is almost over now, and if I can be saved, save me. Oh yes, save me, I conjure you, for his sake ! But if there is no hope for me, then by your feelings as a man, M. Vitali, I entreat you to so manage that all will be over, and that I shall be—guillotined before he returns ! There, I have given you a secret I thought to carry to my grave ; but—but I have another prayer to make. If Henri returns to find they have—killed me ! tell him from me to take no vengeance on anybody—only ask him to believe in my innocence ! Will you promise me that—my friend ? Why do you look at me so haggardly ? Why are you quaking ? ”

Why, indeed ? Why had Justin Vitali’s face turned to marble ? Well might he have moaned at that moment, in the words of the Psalmist, “ All thy rivers and floods have gone over me ! ”

VI.

The trial of Clotilde Desplans attracted to M—— the greatest concourse of strangers that had ever been seen there. How thousands of strangers could hope that there would be room for them in a court of justice which had the greatest difficulty in accommodating two hundred spectators, including unemployed members of the Bar, is one of those mysteries which present themselves whenever there is anything worthy of interest to be seen anywhere. Some sight-seers consoled themselves for their exclusion from the court by lingering about its approaches to catch rumours of what was going on within ; others mobbed the yellow

prison-van that had borne the alleged poisoner from gaol ; the greater number haunted the cafés and exchanged conjectures or made bets about the verdict. The general opinion seemed to be that there would be a conviction. The Deputy-Procurator's indictment had somehow got published in the papers (such documents almost always do) before being delivered in court, and the chain of evidence it furnished seemed powerfully strong. It was not widely known that this Deputy-Procurator, regarding Justin Vitali as his personal enemy since the offer of the Procurator-Generalship to the latter, had made it a point of honour to obtain the conviction of the Corsican's client, for all means of humbling a rival are good.

He rather overleaped his mark, however, for some of the constructions put upon the prisoner's acts seemed a trifle strained even to the minds of a provincial jury and audience, so that the effect of the indictment, as read in a sing-song voice by the Procurator's clerk, was flat. The interrogatory of the prisoner by the presiding judge was the true beginning of the trial, but here a great disappointment was in store for everybody, seeing that Clotilde's answers were so low spoken as to be almost inaudible save to the Bench and jury. This made her numerous enemies, and converted not a few once enthusiastic partisans to a belief in her guilt ; for to have obtained tickets of admission after endless difficulties, and then to hear nothing of what is being said, would be trying to the impartiality even of a saint. From the presiding judge's comments it was gathered that the prisoner was giving brief but forcible replies, and that the Bench were growing disposed in her favour. It was whispered that Justin Vitali had been

closeted with his client for hours and hours day after day, and that he had coached her as to all questions that could possibly be put—moreover, that the presiding judge had a high opinion of Vitali, and would be likely to bring out all points favourable to the prisoner for his sake—which was true.

The witnesses deposed to nothing new—to nothing but what the public had known for weeks past, and they were besides an uninteresting class of persons—Captain Lacroix's relatives especially so. The one was a fat merchant, the other a lean doctor who squinted, and the ladies in court could not kindle a spark of interest in such people, who evidently thought more of the deceased man's millions than of himself. In fine, the first day of the trial passed off uneventfully. Vitali only rose once or twice in the day to put cross questions to witnesses. These questions were keen as blades, and ripped the evidence given into tatters.

Every one remarked the aged look of the brilliant advocate, who was said to be only thirty years old. His shoulders were bent, his face wan and pinched. Those who sat nearest to him noticed that his black hair was streaked with grey. Ever and anon when the witnesses inveighed with more than usual warmth against the prisoner, he turned towards Madame Desplans and nodded with a smile, as if to give her courage. Once he grasped her hand. All day long spectators kept opera-glasses fixed on his features to try and discover traces of anxiety there, and found none. In sum, the impression produced by his attitude was one that did the prisoner good.

On the second day of the trial, which it was known

would be the last, the court was more crowded if possible than on the first day; but public speculation as to the result had somehow taken a turn, and without being able to explain why, most people believed that there would be an acquittal. The case for the Prosecution was seen to be flimsy: the answers of Clotilde as published in the morning papers appeared fraught with truth—and then Vitali's perfect composure conveyed a presentiment that the defence would be strong. The Deputy-Procurator did not damage his prisoner's case by the speech he made. He was violent, often wild, and Vitali twice tripped him up quietly in inaccuracies of fact. When the luncheon adjournment took place, the audience seemed to be saying: "What, had the Prosecution nothing more to say than that? Surely they have a mine in reserve which they will spring by and by."

They had no mine, however: and it was evident from the Deputy-Procurator's face when he returned into court that he considered his battle lost. He scowled, and got up to ask Clotilde what was the precise date of her leaving school—why and wherefore no one has yet ascertained.

It was two o'clock when Vitali rose to address the jury. The afternoon sun was shining with a mellow light on his face and on that of the prisoner behind him, and both of them seemed to stand in a glory. The gendarmes with their white aiglets, the judges in their scarlet and ermine, the ladies seated behind the bench in dresses of many colours, lit up the court with bright patches. There was a dead silence as Vitali commenced his speech in low but clear tones: then he warmed to his work, and his voice

rang out so distinctly that it was audible in the remotest corners. During two hours he spoke, and with a quiet force, a dignity, a beauty of eloquence that kept his hearers enthralled. The women who heard him, and who are faultless judges in such cases, said he must have a great grief at heart, for at times it was as though a stream of tears ran through his utterances. But he never quavered or faltered, never missed the thread of his discourse, never let emotion jar upon the melody of his soft, earnest, persuasive tone. He spoke without notes—so full was he of his case—so well did he remember every fact, every date. As his speech progressed, the proofs accumulated by the Prosecution seemed to melt like blocks of ice under the sun. Then one by one he took up the atoms, crushed and reduced them to water till nothing seemed to remain, nothing but a universal belief in the prisoner's innocence. When he saw that he had carried his jury—and none had a quicker eye to a jury's mood than Vitali—he came to his peroration. Turning towards Clotilde, who was crying, he pointed to her, and in a voice of unspeakable pity, respect, and kindness, said: "Gentlemen, I leave her in your hands. Look at her. Has she the appearance of a murderess?"

The jury returned their verdict without leaving the box. It was "Not Guilty," on all counts, and a general cheer arose in court. At this moment a young man in travelling garb scaled the seats which separated the auditorium from the court, rushed across the prætorium, and flung himself into Vitali's arms.

"Ah, I can guess," said Vitali in a trembling voice. "You are M. Henri de Barre. Take your bride, sir,

and Heaven be with you both!" Saying which he placed the young man's hand in those of Clotilde, who was stretching them across the dock, between the two gendarmes, her late custodians, who were brushing honest drops from their eyes.

Some two hours later the beadle of the Church of St. Gudule being about to close the doors of the church, noticed that there was a stranger in one of the lateral chapels. He walked up to him and apprised him that dusk had come. The stranger was kneeling and sobbing like a child. As he rose to go, the beadle opened his eyes, for it struck him that the grief-stricken man bore a strange resemblance to Justin Vitali, whose name was just then in everybody's mouth—even those of beadles.

A ROMANCE BY RUM-LIGHT.

A ROMANCE BY RUM-LIGHT.



I.

IF I were to say that we hoped to light up the whole of Paris with the blaze of that plum-pudding which we were preparing to do honour to our English guest, John Brokenshire, I should be indulging in one of those figures of speech which, poet as I am, I think should be used rather in verse than in prose. But Noémie, the children, and I had resolved that there should be enough rum round that pudding to remind our English friend in no dubious fashion of Christmas in his own insular home. Noémie had spent two days in combining the ingredients, the number and strangeness whereof made our French minds wonder; and it was good as a picture to see her stand with a wooden spoon in one hand and a list in the other, asking herself whether after all she had not forgotten something. We were both agreed that the dish which John Brokenshire and his countrymen love must have been invented by a grocer in difficulties, anxious to sell off a variegated stock, and willing, by the same occasion, to do a good turn to his friends, the doctor and the chemist.

Pudding, though, formed but one feature in our prepara-

tions, for I had ransacked the books that treat of English customs, and found that John Brokenshire would feel unwelcome unless we all kissed him under a branch of Druidical mistletoe, and encouraged him to do the same by us. So mistletoe hung from a hook in the ceiling. Then the sideboard was graced by six bottles of British ale, labelled with little red pyramids; and two of Oporto, not to be touched with a pair of tongs for the crusts and cobwebs on them, and three more of our own national vintage of Champagne, which you will allow me to think is a not unconvivial wine when capped with gold leaf, and bearing the Duke de Montebello's *carte blanche* mark to guarantee its being made of the full white grape that grows on the sunny slopes near Rheims.

Meanwhile, an odour of soup and roasting came from the little kitchen, where Noémie had just enough room to move about among her ruddy saucepans and white dishes, with her sleeves rolled up to her shapely elbows, and her cheeks pink from the glow of the stove-range. The two children, Victor and Louisette, sat each on a stool making themselves useful. Victor was scraping a truffle of pungent perfume; Louisette was cutting out one of those paper frills that are fastened to ham bones. Hard by, on the hot-plate, a goose in a baking-dish was hissing vespers plaintively in his own juice, pending the time when he should be laid on his supreme bed of apple sauce. By the by, looking to the goose's ultimate destiny, may not his career on earth be described in the words of my brother poet, Horace, as *ab ovo usque ad mala*? I beg your pardon. . .

Noémie Leblanc was not my wife, nor was I her children's uncle—only their godfather. We clubbed much

together, for we all lived on the fifth floor of one of those big Parisian houses whose roofs seem to reach up to the skies whenever the weather is misty, and cast shadows right across the street when the sun shines. The lowermost story was occupied by a printing-office, where Noémie was employed as reader to two newspapers—one Republican, the other Royalist—which were struck off by the same presses and published under one roof, though their principles differed like fire and water. Her work occupied her during twelve hours of every day; and while she was punctuating the articles that were to instruct our countrymen in the principles engendered by a fruitful series of revolutions, I, sitting in my attic and writing, used to keep an eye on the children. My door remained open, that they might run across the landing from their apartment to mine. What games they had! If they were not up to some piece of mischief that kept the whole upper part of the house in an uproar, they scarcely considered that they were playing. One of their favourite amusements was to filch some damp clay from a neighbouring sculptor's studio, and to make exploding pancakes. Having flattened out the clay to the size of a cheeseplate, they impressed a little hollow in the middle with the thumb, then threw the pancake with force on the floor. The sudden compression of air in the hollow caused it to explode with a noise like the eruption of a gasometer. It was a delightful sport.

Victor was seven, and Louissette six. They were good children, with affectionate ways and merry voices—he, an intelligent little urchin, much addicted to spoiling bits of wood in the carpenter's shop next door, on pretence of learning upholstery; she, a damsel with gay blue eyes,

already versed in the wiles of her sex for getting what she wanted, even when it might not be convenient to let her have the same. The pair went to the communal school every morning with knapsacks on their backs full of books and bread-and-butter; and if my door was not open when they set out, they rapped at it, and called me lazy through the keyhole. At four they returned, and I rather think that was the pleasantest hour in the day to me, notwithstanding that they would herald their arrival by a terrific clatter of their small shoes on the wooden staircase, which the *concierge* was at such pains to polish twice a week with beeswax. From four to seven, when their mother came back, rather tired of her proof-correcting, to make supper ready, I had Victor and Louisette all to myself, or, to speak more truly, they had me all to them. Many are the poetic inspirations which they have nipped short by playing hide-and-seek behind my bed, and dragging me into their game by the coat-tails when I was immersed in that difficult task of finding rhymes—as laborious often as fishing for pearls.

I have told you that I am a poet. I write verses that are widely read and pondered over by thoughtful minds; but, unlike my countryman Victor Hugo, I attune my lyre to sing the products of man's industry rather than the works of Nature, which, maybe, have panegyrists enough. I indite versified advertisements for pushing firms, whose names cover large spaces in the outer sheets of newspapers; and I excel, so they say, in the ornate description of articles suitable for human attire, chiefly feminine. I have turned sonnets upon bonnets, but am not above rhyming to a pill or a pickle. One of the most fanciful

things that ever flowed from my pen was a little epigram in four lines, which the purchaser, a hairdresser, ambitiously gave out as his own, and caused to be stuck on all the pomatum pots that left his shop. The best of this sort of work is that it keeps a man in beefsteaks, which the higher sort of epics do not, so far as my experience of them goes ; but the more important point to me was that, by picking up a little more money than was essential to my needs, I was enabled to assist my neighbour Noémie Leblanc in bringing up the children, her own slender earnings being much curtailed by the sums which she sent regularly every quarter-day to her absent husband.

Where was that husband ? had he deserted her ? Had he gone away, as so many husbands do, with grand hopes of making a fortune, which had all come to nothing, and obliged him to fall back on his wife's wages ? No, Jules Leblanc was a political exile in New Caledonia.

He had got mixed up in the doings of the Commune, and had been sentenced to transportation for life, though a milder man than he, and one less disposed to upset existing arrangements for the government of mankind, I never saw. Talk to him of charters and barricades, why he could not so much as understand what was the use of the vote which the Constitution had conferred on him, and he would have given it to the first canvasser as readily as a sou to a beggar. But Jules was a humorist ; and in that droll, honest head of his Nature had implanted a gift for caricature, which served him to sketch you off a cabinet minister with a monkey's tail, or a cardinal with long ears, in no time. He called this mere fun, and thought he was only doing a laughable thing when he stopped in Paris

during the civil war and brought out a comic paper, which contained twice a week a coloured cartoon of one of the generals or Royalist statesmen of the Versailles party. Fun indeed ! when the generals got hold of him they showed him what fun was. He would have been shot but for Noémie's throwing herself at the feet of some man in authority, who had just influence enough to get the sentence commuted into one of transportation. We were obliged to be content with that. One weary, dry summer day Noémie travelled down to Toulon with the two children (the one a baby in arms then, the other a toddling mite not two years old) to see Jules a last time before he sailed in the convict ship. I think I can see that day now. The sun was baking hot, and the streets of Toulon were hardly fit for a dog to cross. Jules passed along the port amidst a large gang, all handcuffed and guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets ; and Noémie could do no more than wave her handkerchief to him from a distance. He answered by kissing his fettered hands once, twice, and smiling to exhort her to keep up her spirits for the children's sake. Noémie, half distracted, made another effort to get near him, but there was a crowd of other wives and mothers around her, all sobbing, and the police were obliged to force them back. So Jules disappeared, stepping on to the gangway that led to the ugly black transport, where he was to be cooped up for four months with felons and murderers, and with some convicts, maybe, as innocent as himself.

John Brokenshire, the Englishman, had come down to Toulon about a contract for supplying this very transport with tinned meat. He was standing by when Noémie

swooned. Catching her in his arms he bore her to the nearest wine-shop, and when she had come to herself he swore one of those curt oaths peculiar to his shy race, vowing that it would be one of his objects in life thenceforth to procure Jules Leblanc's pardon.

John Brokenshire was a dry man, with a cold blue eye that repelled people of the begging sort. He never gushed with sentiment, as we Frenchmen do; and he seldom made promises, but when he did he kept them. He redeemed his pledge in this instance more largely than could have been expected, seeing that his words had been spoken under the influence of pity, which might have been a passing emotion.

But alas! it is not much that a commercial traveller can effect, even one so energetic as John Brokenshire. This much only could our Englishman do, and did—he kept Noémie supplied with news from her husband, and Jules with letters and remittances from Noémie. There never was such a man for knowing people. Being constantly on the move, having business connections everywhere, and not caring whether he compromised himself, since our French laws had no hold on him, John Brokenshire found it easy enough to smuggle letters in and out of the penal colony. He fancied at first it would be easy to obtain the pardon too by pulling the proper wires; but in this he was mistaken. Either the wires were rusty or he had not got hold of the right ones. Our Government does not so readily loose men at whose opinions it has taken fright. The Englishman's ill-success made him fret and abuse the political ferocity of Frenchmen with all the vigour of that liberalism which grows on the banks of the Thames; but he

neither despaired, nor suffered us to do so ; and we knew that, wherever he went and whatever he did, he bore Jules Leblanc in mind. If he was buying wine of a Bordeaux merchant he would mention the exile's case between two tastes of samples ; he begged sympathy for him of influential silk merchants, importers of British cutlery, coffee-brokers, and indigo salesmen. He had all the particulars of the poor caricaturist's offence and its mitigating circumstances by heart, and spoke of them to journalists and politicians whom he met in his travels, thereby widening every day the circle of those who knew something about poor Jules and pitied him.

That is how John Brokenshire came to be our friend. That is why, every Christmas Day since that year when Noémie had been widowed by decree of a court-martial, he was the chief guest at a banquet which we prepared of such delicacies as he loved ; and seasoned with a frank French welcome. That is why we were expecting him with our goose, our mistletoe, our pudding, and our homely wishes, on the occasion of which I am now writing—which was last Christmas Day.

II.

“*Les voici !* Here they come !” exclaimed little Victor, clapping his hands as the first ascending steps of our guests were heard on the staircase ; and Louise, bravely tricked out in a Scottish tartan dress, with a Royal-Stuart sash, clung to her mother's gown, and half hid herself behind it, with one finger in her mouth—making believe to be timid, the sly puss, as if ever little French girls had really wanted for assurance !

It was six o'clock. The room was lit, the cloth laid, and Noémie stood ready to receive her visitors by the crackling fire of pear-wood logs. How pretty she looked! How sweetly sad and gentle in her black silk dress and the small lace cap that covered her glossy chestnut hair! She was but twenty-seven then, and grief had not aged her—it had only thrown a wistful look into her blue eyes, and subdued her manner to a quietness like that of a nurse in a sick room. For the sake of her children, who could not remember their father, she had been obliged to maintain an outward serenity more heroical than sorrow; and had forced herself always to smile in their presence, that their young hearts might not be moulded to a melancholy which would change to moroseness when they grew older. Only those who knew Noémie as I did guessed how her wifely heart ached with hope long deferred. How she could work so exactly as she did at her correction of proofs—never missing a stray comma, nor an ill-placed circumflex, and amending even grammatical errors in the neatest of hands—was to me a mystery. Grattelot, the foreman of the printer's works, and Barbelard, the sub-editor of one of the two Republican journals on which Noémie was employed, were as much puzzled as I; but they had ended by concluding that Madame Leblanc was of a philosophical turn, a master-woman, who thought that crying spoilt the eyes. They and their wives were to be our guests on this evening. By the hearty way in which they entered, sniffing our goose and glancing at our bottles, it was evident that they did not consider they were intruding into an abode of sorrow.

Grattelot, Barbelard, their spouses, and John Broken-

shire, formed the total of our expected company—that is including Noémie, the children, and self, nine of us, the number of the Muses, were to sit down to table. Neither Grattelot, Barbelard, nor their wives, reminded one of the Muses though. The printer's foreman was a little swarthy fellow who had a Rabelaisian leer, and spoke with the richest brogue of Marseilles. He used z's for j's, and pronounced *o* as *ou*. Out of his experience in the printshop he had picked up an odd jumble of education and a standing grievance against all literary men, whom he accused of never measuring their productions to the requirements of newspaper size. He cared nothing for style or logic: "Give me adaptability," he would say; and his universal test of merit was: "Will this article run to more or less than a column and a quarter?" If it ran to more the writer was stamped in his mind as a man of incontinent verbiage; if to less, he was one who lacked elasticity of expression. Grattelot had a respect for poets because their lines were easy to set up in type, and did capitally as padding; and of course he gave the palm of poetry to bards who did not write in Alexandrines. He has often told me that he preferred an ode of mine to the finest idyll by M. François Coppée; and I felt much flattered by the compliment till I discovered it was owing solely to my fondness for six-foot versification, not to the subject-matter of my odes, which Grattelot never read.

Barbelard, the sub-editor, was another literary curiosity, for he could only read with difficulty, and spelt no word in our language correctly save his own name. He had been appointed sub-editor by reason of his gigantic stature and his prowess with all duelling weapons. An old sergeant of

the Cent Gardes, who had been decorated for carrying off two Austrian colonels prisoners (one under each arm) in the Italian war, he stood six French feet in his socks, and had a pair of bristling red moustaches which, when he was angry, looked as if they were aflame. It was Barbelard who assumed the responsibility of all the unsigned articles in the Republican journal which employed him; and if any stranger came to ask for explanations about personalities, this imposing sub-editor was there to answer him in the correctest language of chivalry. He tendered no apologies or explanations, but would forthwith be ready to accept a challenge to fight next morning, early, with swords or pistols, according as might be most convenient. This often led to little dialogues, somewhat in the following fashion:—

STRANGER (*bouncing in furiously with the offending journal in his hand*).—Sir, I want to see the man who wrote this article.

BARBELARD (*rising with dignity from the sub-editorial seat, with a pipe in his mouth*).—Young man, it's me as wrote that article. If you want to objectionise, name your friends, and we'll have it out at daybreak.

STRANGER (*growing civil*).—Ah no. . . . I have merely come to renew my subscription to the paper. . . . What a warm day it is. . . . Goo-o-d morning. . . . (*and exit*).

Sometimes, however, a duel would arise, and then Barbelard always showed himself magnanimous in inflicting only flesh-wounds—just mere flea-bites, as he called them, ripping up the arm for twelve inches or so, or carrying off an insignificant little piece from the aggressor's calf. Barbelard had fought a round dozen of duels; but he owed another duty to his newspaper besides fighting, for he

appeared in the correctional courts to answer all charges of attacking the Government, and underwent the sentences of imprisonment to which members of the staff were condemned. He had come to look upon the gaol of Ste. Pélagie much as a second home, and was never sorry to go there for a few months, for he got double pay, unlimited allowance of tobacco, and excellent meals, sent in daily from the restaurant at the expense of his employers so long as his incarceration lasted. Madame Barbelard, a little black-haired woman with despotic eyes, used affectionately to remark that she was always more pleased to see her husband in prison than out of it, for she knew then that he was not in mischief—risking his life in mortal combat, or drinking more absinthe than was good for him at the café. Prison life was such a saving, too, for she could go every day to sit with Barbelard from ten to six, take her meals with him, and economise thereby the cost of marketing and kitchen fuel. She had no opinion of Liberal governments, ascribing their unwillingness in sending journalists to prison to sordid stinginess with the public purse.

It turned out that on this Christmas Day when he came to dine with us, honest Barbelard had one of his periodical scores of durance to wipe off, for his first remark to us when he had shaken hands with Noémie and kissed the children, was about going to Ste. Pélagie on the morrow, "Three months for writing disrespectfully of the Senate," he said in his dry bass voice, and casting a sidelong glance of anticipation at the *chiffonnière* where the bottles stood.

"Yes, three whole months!" exclaimed little Madame Barbelard in glee. "I had some hopes it might have been six, for then we could have saved up enough to

buy that pretty villa at Suresnes, on which I have set my heart."

"We'll make up for it by taking three more months in the summer, if all goes well, my dear," said Barbelard, good-humouredly; "too much off the reel isn't good: one likes to get out and breathe the air now and then."

"Ah, that's just it; and then hatfuls of francs are spent in billiards and little glasses with your friends!" responded Madame Barbelard, tartly. "Think of what nice things we might do if you remained for a whole twelvemonth under lock and key!"

"I wonder why they never send printers' foremen to prison," said Madame Grattelot, querulously. She was an Alsatian dame, very fleshy and frugal, and talked with that grinding Strasburg accent, which used to make us Frenchmen laugh till all the sturdy men and women of our fairest Rhenish province passed under the Prussian yoke. "*Lieber Himmel!*" continued she, "what would I not give to see Sesostris in prison for a year, that we might save a little money in these not-to-be-equalled-for-hardness times!"

Sesostris was Grattelot, and he laughed: "Softly, Mamma Gredel—if I were sent to prison thou wouldest save nothing, for I should have to go there at my own cost. The good times when printers were imprisoned went away with the Empire."

"I wish the Empire would come back then," declared Madame Grattelot. "There should be equal privileges for all: if a sub-editor goes to prison, a printer should be allowed to go too."

At this Madame Barbelard fired up, for she was a stickler about her husband's prerogatives.

"But you forget, Madame, a sub-editor runs greater risks, for he has to draw the sword at times!" she observed with a touch of asperity.

"Doubtless, Madame, but Sesostris would fight too if need were," retorted the Alsatian dame, drily; "and all I say is that it's hard that all the enjoyment should go to one set of parties, when there's room enough in those prisons for other parties if the Government only chose to make better laws."

Noémie diverted the course of this delicate dispute. It was in her nature to play the peacemaker. I have seen her in the old times, before her husband went away, reconcile a roomful of artists, who were quarrelling about æsthetic art, by setting a jug of beer in their midst. She did something of the sort now by bringing out a decanter of kirsch and some liqueur glasses to whet our appetites. Such potations make tongues soft. We were still expecting John Brokenshire. The children had climbed on to Barbelard's huge knee, something like a camel's lump in size, and were riding a cock-horse on it. The two lady guests, possibly struck of a sudden by the incongruity of vaunting the delights of imprisonment in the hearing of Noémie, who was pining after her captive husband, fell to conversing with their hostess on the more congenial topic of children's garments. Grattelot, pleasantly inhaling the odours of good things that came from the kitchen, took his stand by the mantel-shelf, and talked to me about my natty and "handy" verses. He was delighted with a recent sonnet of mine on a newly invented bootjack.

The half after six struck from the steeple of a neighbouring church. It was at that hour that John Brokenshire

was due ; and he never came late, for he regulated every movement of his by a powerful chronometer that told the days of the week and month, and even the changes of the moon. The children pricked up their ears. "L'Ami Brokenshire" was to them the very incarnation of Father Christmas, for he never failed to come with parcels of toys under his arms, and bags of sugar-plums in his pocket. Was he going to be late this year, just for once? No, here he came. Those were his well-known strides on the staircase, clearing four steps at a time, like a giraffe racing uphill. One step more and he would be here.

"Le voici !" cried little Victor and his sister, jumping off Barbelard's knee with a loud crowing, and off they rushed into the passage. Another minute, and John Brokenshire, parcels, wraps, comforter and all, was standing under the mistletoe to be hugged and kissed. We all kissed him, men and women, as the fashion is in our country ; and I promise you Noémie Leblanc's salute was not the least hearty, though she did make a little sisterly blushing about it.

III.

Imagine the lankiest of men, with cheek-bones the hue of red-currant jelly, a hay-coloured beard flowing over his waistcoat, a grey tweed suit delved about with deep pockets fore and aft, and there you have John Brokenshire as he appeared every day in the year ; add a little fog that hung about his flaxen hair, and the bluish end of his nose, and a broad smile that displayed his long yellow teeth, like a whole game at dominoes coloured by long use, and you will have him as he showed himself on this

particular occasion of Christmas festivity in our hospitable Parisian lodging.

Christmas was his one day of rest in the year, if rest it can be called to breakfast with an uncle in the suburbs at eight, to attend Divine service in the British church at eleven, after that to lunch with a married sister, and to wind up with three hours' racing among toy-shops to bargain for the best sort of gifts for a legion of juvenile friends at retail price. But this was rest to John Brokenshire, comparatively speaking, for mostly he was in a hurry to catch express trains. Christmas was the one day on which he did no travelling but that which was done for his own pleasure, and the maintenance of affectionate relations with his kinsfolk and acquaintances. When he came to dine on the 25th of December with Noémie Leblanc, we might be sure that he would have the whole evening to himself, and not bolt away between the roast and sweets, as he was certain to do if invited on any other day of any other month in the year.

"Mong Dew, mes Amis, quel plaisir d'être un peu tronqueel!" exclaimed this worthy man, drawing a fifteen-bladed knife from one of his score of pockets, and beginning to cut the strings of his various parcels. "Only to think! pas de voyage until four fifteen to-morrow morning, when I'm off for Lyons! Monsieur Barbelard, you seem to me fresh and hale; I've brought you a pair of furred slippers to wear in prison."

"Thank you, Monsieur John," laughed the tall sub-editor. "You seem gay enough too; your business is prosperous, I hope?"

"Business is so-so," said John Brokenshire. "There

are times, in this country of yours, when money can be hauled in with a net, and others when it has to be angled for, coin by coin, with a fish-hook. It depends on politics, which are shift-y things everywhere."

"Politics come of newspapers," remarked Grattelot; "if people would read more books and fewer journals, it would be better for trade."

"Not for *my* trade," said Barbelard, finishing his kirsch. "Here's to the spread of journalism!"

"Oh, you—you'd like to be setting people by the ears all the year round; but they'll lock you up for longer than you like one of these days," ejaculated the fleshy Madame Grattelot.

"No, Madame, they won't lock him up for longer than he likes; he'll retire from the business if he sees any signs of that," retorted Madame Barbelard.

They were at it again, but John Brokenshire checked them: "Hullo, you were wrangling over that question last year, and the year before," said he; "I shall be thinking myself at Versailles, among the Deputies, if you don't mind. But I tell you what, I am hungry, and the sooner we sit down the better."

"There's that goose in the kitchen squealing to be dished, my dear Noémie," remarked Grattelot, with an enjoyable whiff.

"Ah yes; and, Noémie, mon onfong—don't serve up the pudding in a soup-tureen, as you did a year or two ago," prayed John Brokenshire with a wink.

Noémie laughed at this reminder of a bygone failure in preparing the national English dish. She retired to lend a helping hand to the servant-maid who had been hired for

the evening from the *Rôtisseur's* over the way ; and meanwhile our commercial friend laid out all the presents he had brought. No one had been forgotten. No one—for the Grattelots and Barbelards were old cronies of Brokenshire's—and it was not in his nature to perpetrate slips of memory. The sub-editor got his furred slippers ; the printer's foreman a meerschaum pipe with a pound of Latakieh, bought while selling a stock of old rifles to the Turks in Asia Minor ; Madame Barbelard had a Norwich shawl that looked like Cashmere, and Madame Grattelot had a piece of Lyons silk that looked like what it was—first-rate stuff, and no cheating about the dye. Then came the turn of the children to be helped out of one of those wondrous toy boxes which our Parisian toy-shops send out to develop the instincts of luxury in the minds of French infancy. Victor was presented with a set of articulated soldiers, who made a mimic war in defending a cardboard fort ; and little Louissette was rendered happy with a silk-clad doll that could shut its eyes, and say "Mamma," like a very small child with a stomach-ache. I wish I could add the names of a number of gaudy children's books, illustrated by my sprightly friends MM. Bertall and Grévin ; but I had scarcely time to examine these treasures then, for John Brokenshire thrust something into my own hands—a Russian leather purse, and a pretty full one too. As he did so, he told me that he had been successful in disposing of a whole sheaf of my verses.

This was grateful news that made me redder.

"And I've orders for a lot more, friend Poet," said he, closing that fearful knife of his with a snap. "A publican at Nice wants you to recommend his fried fish, and a

pastry-cook at Arles has a notion that you can make his cream-tarts popular."

"Stick to the six-foot verses, Poet—there's nothing like them for printers," observed Grattelot, who was sucking at the amber mouthpiece of his pipe.

"And then there's a fellow at Carcassonne going to set up some cheap baths," continued Brokenshire, consulting a list. "As this is the first time the people in those parts have seen a bath-house, they may poke fun at the innovation unless the inventor can put the laughers on his side by something smart in the way of an epigram, which he will print on his prospectuses."

"I'll do my best," said I, thinking of a rhyme for soap and water.

"But stop a bit; this isn't all," said John Brokenshire, in that smileless way he had when giving a serious order that he meant to be executed with care and despatch. "I must bespeak some of your best quality verses for a tailor. This is an extra-important case. Do you think you could say something nice and kind about breeches and waistcoats?"

"I happen to have a copy of tailoring verses ready made, and only waiting to be filled up with the purchaser's name," answered I, foraging in my pocket-book.

"Good, then. But are they of your best brew?"

"As good as I can write, I think; but I'll try better, if needful."

"All right, then," said the Englishman; "but stay—we'll hear your verses by and by; now's the time for dinner—and here's Noémie's present."

Saying this, he laid a small square parcel by the side of

Noémie's plate. She had just entered, preceding the servant wench who bore the soup-tureen ; but when she would have stretched forth her hand, smiling, to look at the present, Brokenshire restrained her. "No, my dear, not now. When the plum-pudding comes on, and there's a flash of blue light to cheer us."

His will was law on these occasions. If he had told us all to kneel of a row and guess conundrums, we would have done it. Noémie said nothing, but began ladling out the smoking soup with tranquil acquiescence ; and we all sat down, the Englishman laying his napkin over his knees, while we three Frenchmen tucked ours under our chins, Frenchwise.

I noticed that John Brokenshire had made no remark yet about Noémie's husband, and she had done no more than question him with a silent interrogation of her blue eyes. She knew his ways, and that there was nothing to be got out of him by pressing. If he had anything to say he would divulge it all in due time. For the present he was absorbed in his soup, and we in ours. It was the richest beef-broth flavoured with leeks, and the spoons seemed to dip into it lovingly of their own accord. Only the children had no appetites, being too much excited about their presents, and grudging every moment that delayed them from going back to play with these tokens of John Brokenshire's friendship.

So this dinner of ours proceeded. And ah ! my friends, how I wish I had the pen of those eminent gastronomists, MM. Erckmann-Chatrian, to describe to you what effect that succulent array of dishes had on our jovial minds. None other but the chroniclers of so many brawny feasts in the hard-eating country round Phalsburg could do

justice to the splendid figure which the roast goose cut in his dish, stuffed as he was with chestnuts and truffles, and glistening with the sheenest gravy. A ring of well-browned sausages surrounded him. His flesh was so plump that the knife sliced deep into it, and the mouthfuls which you ate with the apple-sauce seemed to melt on the tongue. Nor must it be forgotten that we had drink enough to defy indigestion. The yellow ale of England sparkled in our glasses with its white wig of froth, and our own red vin de Grave, so petulant and mirth-compelling, twinkled like molten rubies. Grattelot and Barbelard drank a bottle apiece, and then polished off a third between them. Their wives gnawed the drumsticks, which they held in their fingers like persons who are not ashamed to show they are enjoying themselves; and buxom Madame Grattelot said that all this reminded her of Alsace. John Brokenshire stuck to his beer and made havoc among the sausages. At last we had enough of it, not that we were tired in mind, but because physical nature said "Hold!" Noémie helped to clear away the plates, and the servant wench went out to fetch the pudding.

It was then that I uncorked the champagne bottles and filled the glasses for a toast to our hostess. We always began with that, and followed it with one to John Brokenshire, in those long glasses of the old fashion that show off the bubbles better than the modern top-heavy bowls. At this moment the maid marched in with the pudding, which she held at arms' length, laughing and shutting her eyes. She had set fire to it in the kitchen, and the flames, leaping up in forked tongues of blue, red, and yellow, licked the sprig of holly on the top and made it crackle. The

children clapped their hands, and Barbelard, exhilarated by what he had drunk, shouted "*Vive l'Angleterre!*" There never was such a joyous evening.

John Brokenshire, however, held up a finger to enjoin silence.

"May I open my parcel now?" asked Noémie timidly, but with a woman's curiosity about all things hidden.

"Not yet, my dear—one moment," said John Brokenshire; and he looked across the table to me. "Poet, what did you say about having some verses suitable to a tailor? Mind you, it's a tailor whom I wish to please and honour."

"I have the verses here," said I. "I keep a stock of them ready, in case of getting sudden orders."

"A good plan," said our commercial friend.

"Sometimes inspiration doesn't come when wanted," I explained, smoothing out my verses on the tablecloth. "You may be asked to rhyme to 'blackings' when your thoughts are running on 'eau-de-Cologne.' What is your tailor's name?"

"Jaker, an Englishman; but he lives in France. Fill up that name in your blanks if it will scan. If not, contrive to make it scan."

"It will scan," said I, drawing out a pencil.

"Well then, read on," begged John Brokenshire. "This is no common matter, and we'll all listen."

I was struck by John Brokenshire's tone—one of greater gravity than the circumstances seemed to call for. Reading aloud is not my *forte*, and I would have gladly passed on my verses to Noémie, who had a sweet musical voice, well suited to bring out the beauties of poetry. But she was labouring under the emotion of women when

they suspect some mystery, and was not in the mood for anything in the nature of a public performance. So I did the reading myself in my best company sing-song; and here is the poem I read. I need hardly tell you it was French, but John Brokenshire has since translated it for me into his own tongue and given it a title. I dedicate it with affection and respect to the noble-hearted clothier whose wares it celebrates.

A PAYMENT IN RHYME.

On a summer's morning early, when the grass with dew was pearly,
I called upon a farmer who was feeding little chicks;
He ceased not from his labour, but he said, "Good morning, neighbour;
My breeks are worth a guinea, and they cost me twelve and six."

And the morning sun rose higher, and there came a forage buyer,
And he asked the stalwart farmer for the prices of his ricks:
It was "New hay, four eleven; and the last year's ninety seven;"
And his breeks were worth a guinea, but had cost him twelve and six.

Then a builder, as appointed, came to speak of fences jointed,
And an apple-loft of timber, and a cattle-shed of bricks;
When the notes were duly posted, then again the farmer boasted
That his breeks were worth a guinea, and had cost him twelve and six.

When the clouds at noon grew thinner, then we took a frugal dinner,
And the farmer's buxom daughter did a glass of toddy mix;
And her father, waxing wordy, said his legs were strong and sturdy,
And his breeks were worth a guinea, but had cost him twelve and six.

To the fish-pond then we sauntered, where I often had the vaunt heard,
"When wheat's in bloom the tench will rise, although you bait with sticks."

And he caught some goodly dishes of the little silver fishes;
And his breeks were worth a guinea, but had cost him twelve and six.

When the sun had finished setting, and the spouse our tea was getting,
He took a pair of candles and put matches to their wicks:
And the swallows on the skylight were remarking in the twilight,
That his breeks were worth a guinea, and had cost him twelve and six.

And I lit a cigarito, for no fair one puts a veto
On the act, since my affections on myself alone I fix ;
And as home I slowly wandered, I enviously pondered,
Would *my* breeks were worth a guinea, and had cost but twelve and six.

In my sleep a vision hailed me, and at first my courage failed me ;
But he smiled, and then I knew it was no courier of Old Nick's :
"I'm the ghost of William Jaker, England's famous breeches-maker,
And my wares are worth a guinea, but shall cost you twelve and six."

I finished reading, and gazed at my plate as authors do
when they have been airing their talents in the family circle,
and know that the applause will exceed their dues.

"Bravo !" cried the whole table, children included ;
and there was a chorus of compliments from all save
Grattelot, who deplored that I had abandoned the safe
path of six-foot lyrics.

"If you write such long verses as those, you might just
as well be doing prose," said he sententiously.

"Hush !" exclaimed John Brokenshire. "Hand over
the paper to me, Poet. You'll be glad to give it gratis
(though it will be paid for, don't fear*), when you learn
that William Jaker is a man who makes breeches for the
President of the Republic's favourite valet."

"Ah !" ejaculated Madame Grattelot admiringly.

"An old soldier—I knew him," chimed in Barbelard.
"He was one of those who stormed the Malakoff Tower ;
but he wears black breeches and a white choker now, like
a notary."

"And he shaves his master every morning," said John
Brokenshire.

I bowed my acknowledgments, but looked puzzled.

* It was paid for in kind—superfine and a perfect fit.

Noémie, quicker as women are, detected some meaning in the phrase, and changed colour.

"Consequently William Jaker has influence, you see," continued John Brokenshire, shaking the pudding-dish to make the flames go on leaping. "You know servants have often more power than Cabinet Ministers. So when I got talking to William Jaker about poor Jules Leblanc's case, I knew that if he repeated the thing to the Marshal, he would be throwing seed on good ground."

"And did he repeat it?" asked Noémie breathless.

"Yes, my dear, he did," said John Brokenshire. "He repeated it while he was plying his lather, and while the Marshal had a napkin round his neck, so that he couldn't budge."

"*Ach lieber Himmel!*—the brave man. And did anything come of it?" asked Madame Grattelot.

"Well, Noémie may open her parcel now," answered the Englishman.

"What's in it?" we all asked, excited, as Noémie, with trembling fingers, unloosed the string.

"It contains your husband's pardon, my dear," said John Brokenshire. "And now to the pudding!"

THE END.

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